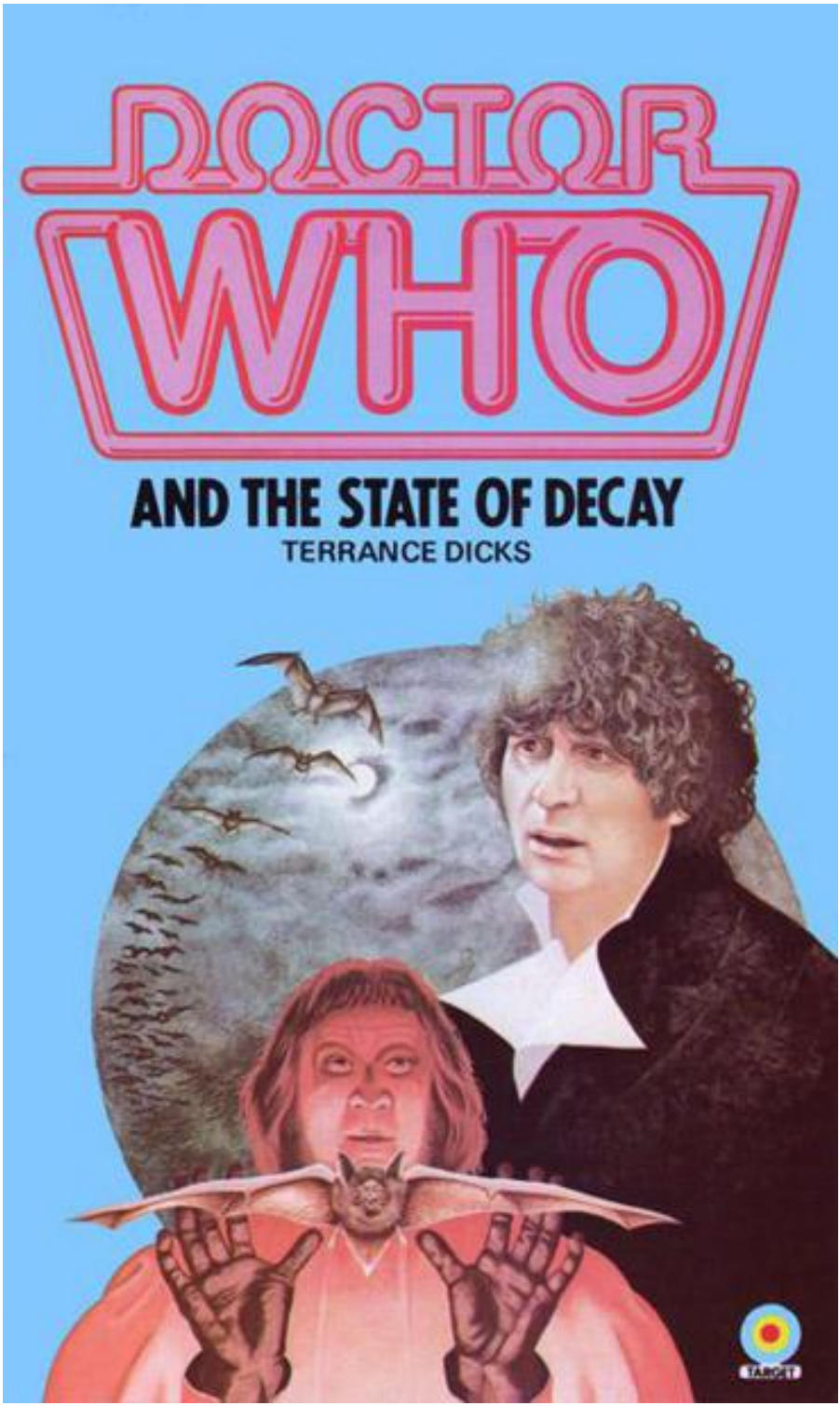
DOCTOR WHO

AND THE STATE OF DECAY

TERRANCE DICKS



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1

The Selection

Looming above the Village was the dark Tower. Its pointed turrets reared up against the night sky, dominating the landscape as they had done for a thousand years. The simple village dwellings huddled about its base. Beyond the Village was a scattering of ploughed fields, bordered on one side by dense forests, on the other by swamp.

There were no lights in the Village, no movement in its unpaved streets. All was silent. Only one building gave out a few chinks of light from its shuttered windowsthe long, low village hall, known as the Centre, where the villagers gathered for their communal meals. There were lights in the Tower, too. Those who dwelt there kept late hours, and were seldom seen in daylight.

Day and night, the approaches to the Tower were patrolled by guards, grim-faced men clad in black-leather jerkins, studded with steel. They carried pikes and swords and wore daggers at their belts. A few of them, the senior and most trusted, carried heavy blasters in worn holsters at their belts.

One of them was Habris, Captain of the Guard. Lean and grim-faced like his fellows, he marched along the gloomy corridors of the Tower with reluctant haste. The haste was because he was on the business of the Lords, and dared not delay. The reluctance was because, as always, to enter the presence of his rulers made Habris sweat with fear.

He paused outside the great State Room, scowling at the door guards, who sprang to attention.

What was it about the Lords, he wondered, that filled him with such unreasoning terror? They were cold and distant, but no more so than to be expected of those in such a high position. They were swift to punish those who failed them, but they valued good service, and Habris knew he stood high in their favour. It wasn't so much any quality they possessed, decided Habris, it was something they lacked. There was a sense of something remote and alien about them. It was the way they looked at you, as if you were a member of some different, inferior species, whose concerns were of no real interest to them.

It was as though they weren't quite human.

Habris became aware that the door guards were standing rigidly to attention, their faces filled with terror, assuming no doubt that his scowl was for them. Consoling himself with the thought that they feared him just as much as he feared the Lords, Habris braced himself and marched into the state Room.

Lord Zargo and Lady Camilla were sitting on their twin thrones. Between them stood Aukon, their Councillor. The three Lords were talking in low voices. They broke off and looked up when Habris entered.

He marched up to the dais and bowed low. 'It is the Time of Selection, my Lord.'

Zargo leaned forward, black eyes glittering in the pale, bearded face. 'Choose well, Habris. Let them be young and strong, filled with life.'

'It is spirit, not flesh, that the Great One prizes,' said Aukon. There was reproof in his voice. Habris thought no one but Aukon would dare take such a tone with Lord Zargo.

Lady Camilla's eyes, too, shone with feverish excitement. 'Yet flesh and blood has its place, Aukon.'

'I still look in vain for the first of the Chosen Ones. The Great One will need new servants at the Time of Arising.

Remember that, Habris.'

'Yes, Lord Aukon.'

Habris bowed, and left the State Room, relieved to be on his way.

In the Centre, the villagers were gathered, waiting. As always, at the Time of Selection, there was a kind of subdued tension in the air. All those of Selection age were assembled in the hall, and Ivo, the burly Village headman, moved among them, pausing here and there to tap a young man or a young woman on the shoulder, ignoring the looks of mute appeal from their anguished parents.

Those he tapped moved to the centre of the hall, where they formed a long straggling line. They stood there, heads bowed, waiting apathetically.

The far end of the hall formed a kind of kitchen area and Karl, Ivo's son, was standing there with his mother, Marta. He was bigger and stronger than any of the young men in the room, and Marta looked fondly at him. He would be as big as his father some day — if he lived.

Suddenly, to her horror, Karl moved away from her side and went to join the other young people in the centre of the room.

Ivo swung round and glared at him. 'Karl, get back! Get out of the way!'

'Why, father? Shouldn't I be standing with the others?

Just because I'm your son —'

' *I said get back!* '

Clamping a massive hand on his son's shoulder, Ivo shoved him back to the kitchen area. Marta grabbed him by the sleeve and thrust him towards one of the wooden benches. 'Sit there, boy. Do as your father tells you.'

Sulkily Karl sat down. No one protested.

A few minutes later Habris came into the hall with a squad of guards.

He nodded to Ivo and glanced around the room. 'Are they all here?'

'They are all here,' said Ivo steadily.

Habris began moving along the line, pausing before each of the young men and women. Sometimes he passed on, sometimes he tapped the one before him on the shoulder. Those he tapped moved out of the

line and went to stand in a steadily growing group by the door.

Habris went on with his task with mechanical efficiency, looking, as he had been instructed, for any spark of resentment or rebellion. As always, there was nothing.

Like cattle, the victims waited to be chosen, and like cattle they stood patiently by the door. When Habris was finished, perhaps a third of those in the line had been chosen. He waved his hand, and the rest moved hurriedly to rejoin their waiting parents.

The Selection was over.

Or — not quite. Habris felt rather than saw that someone was glaring at him. He turned slowly, and saw Karl, Ivo's son, sitting on a bench in the kitchen area, his eyes burning with anger.

Habris knew that Karl was Ivo's son, that Ivo had been holding him back from Selection. And he knew too that the Lords had recently become dissatisfied with the quality of those he had chosen. Here at last was someone with the spirit that they had demanded. Habris pointed to Karl.

'You! Come here!'

Karl rose and moved slowly towards him.

Ivo hurried to stand between them. 'No, Habris. He is not for Selection.'

Habris hesitated. He and Ivo were not exactly friends, but they shared a mutual respect, based on their different kinds of authority. Besides, Ivo was responsible for the distribution of food, and he took good care to took after his friends. Like everyone in the Village, Habris's main concern was with his own survival. There was a good chance that Karl was of the kind the Lords were seeking. It would please them if Habris brought him back. Moreover, if Habris felt that Karl was suitable and did not bring him, Aukon would know. It was more than dangerous to keep secrets from Lord Aukon — it was impossible. Somehow, Aukon would pluck the truth from his mind and before long the guards would have a new Captain.

Harshly Habris said, 'I have to follow the procedure.

You know that.'

‘Why?’ said Karl furiously. ‘Why must we obey those in the Tower? Why do you obey them, Habris? You’re not an evil man. You eat with us sometimes, my father gives you wine...’

Habris’s black-gloved fist struck him under the ear, felling him to the ground.

Habris turned to Ivo. ‘It has to be done. You understand.’

Ivo said nothing.

Half-dazed, Karl struggled to his knees. Habris reached down to pull him upright. Suddenly Karl thrust his hand aside, and sprinted for the door.

‘Stop him,’ yelled Habris. The guards were already moving to block Karl’s escape. Two of them grabbed his arms, and he was dragged over to the rest of the chosen group.

Habris said, ‘The boy has spirit, Ivo. I’ll try to get them to take him as a guard. I can promise nothing, you understand.’

Still Ivo did not speak. Something about the expression on his face made Habris shiver and he turned away. With an angry gesture he waved the guards and their prisoners away, and, followed them from the hall without looking back.

Marta ran sobbing towards Ivo, burying her head in his chest. Ivo put a massive arm around her shoulders and stared over her head, his face like stone.

2

The Strangers

The Doctor was lost.

It was not the first time in his many lives, but on this occasion he was rather more seriously lost than usual, not just on the wrong planet or in the wrong time but in the wrong universe.

At the conclusion of a recent adventure, the TARDIS

had been sucked through a kind of whirlpool in the fabric of Space/Time, and had emerged into something the Doctor called the exo-Space/Time continuum — E-Space for short.

Now he was studying the instrument readings on the many-sided central control panel of the TARDIS, trying.

to work out some way of getting the TARDIS back into normal Space. Romana, his Time Lady companion, and K9, a small mobile computer who just happened to look like a robot dog, watched him gloomily. Both suspected, quite rightly, that prospects were not very good.

The Doctor straightened up, running his fingers through a tangle of curly hair.

'Well, Doctor?' asked Romana impatiently.

The Doctor chose to take her question literally. 'Yes, I'm fine thanks. The poor old TARDIS is feeling a bit queasy though.'

'Really!'

'Still, so would you be if you were warping about in E-Space.'

'That's just what we're doing, Doctor.'

'Yes, I know, but not personally.' The Doctor patted the console. 'Poor old girl.'

It always infuriated Romana when the Doctor spoke of the TARDIS as if it was a living creature. 'But we are personally trapped here, Doctor;' she said, through gritted teeth.

The Doctor said optimistically, 'There's a low probability we can slip off home the same way we got here.'

'But meanwhile we're trapped,' said Romana with gloomy relish.

'Don't keep saying that, Romana.'

K9 interrupted them. 'Master?'

'Not now, K9.'

Romana switched on the scanner, which showed nothing but empty space, tinged with a rather sinister shade of green. 'Well, we *are* trapped, Doctor, admit it.

Marooned in the exo-Space/Time continuum!'

The Doctor remained infuriatingly cheerful. 'Well, you never know, it

might turn out to be quite nice here. Once we've seen the sights, met a few people...'

Romana waved towards the scanned. 'Supposing there aren't any planets here?'

'Come on, Romana, E-Space isn't that small. There must be planets here — we'll find one sooner or later.'

Despairingly Romana turned away. It was almost as if the Doctor was enjoying the situation. 'Doctor, you're incredible.'

'Well, yes, I suppose I am,' said the Doctor modestly.

'I've never given it much thought.'

'Master!' said K9 again.

'Well, what is it?'

'There is one isolated planet at extreme limit of scanner range.'

'Well, why didn't you tell me?' said the Doctor rather unfairly.

'Is it inhabited?'

'Habitable, Master.'

'Atmosphere?'

'Atmosphere and gravity approach closely to Earth normal,' said K9 importantly. 'Day equivalent to 23.3

Earth hours, year to 350 Earth days.'

Romana looked unbelievingly at the Doctor. 'How do you do it, Doctor? How did you know?'

'Oh, knowing's easy,' said the Doctor cheerfully.

'Everyone does that *ad nauseam*. I just keep on sort of hoping. That's much harder!' He went over to the console and began setting a course for the strange planet.

Some considerable time later, they were all studying the planet's image on the screen, while K9 scanned its surface with his sensors.

‘Well,’ said the Doctor. ‘What do you make of it, K9?’

‘I have discovered one localised concentration of metal artefacts, Master, suggestive of high technology.’

‘Civilisation!’ said the Doctor exultantly. ‘Maybe their scientists will help us to find a way out of here.’

‘Low energy levels suggest only primitive life-forms,’

said K9 discouragingly.

Romana looked at the Doctor. ‘Sounds as if their civilisation might have come and gone.’

‘The data is anomalous,’ said K9 worriedly.

‘Well, at least there’s life of some kind,’ said the Doctor briskly. ‘And where there’s life...’ He went over to the console. ‘Let’s land and take a look, shall we?’ A minute or so later, the central column of the TARDIS console shuddered slowly to a halt, and the Doctor operated the door control. ‘Well, here goes!’ He went outside.

The TARDIS had materialised on the edge of a wooded clearing, the square blue shape of the police box incongruous beneath the trees. The Doctor looked round approvingly. It was a pleasant spring day. Sunshine filtered down through the tree tops, and birds sang in the branches. All in all, there was a reassuring atmosphere of rural peace. ‘Well now,’ said the Doctor. ‘Isn’t this nice!’

Romana appeared behind him. ‘Why here?’

‘I put us down close to K9’s energy concentration.’ The Doctor fished a little telescope from one of his capacious pockets. ‘As a matter of fact, it should be just over there.’

He put the telescope to his eye and focused it, gazing across a stretch of open country. ‘Ah, there we are. Look!’ He passed the telescope to Romana.

She took it, adjusted the focus, and found herself looking at an oddly-shaped tower crowned with three pointed turrets. At the base of the Tower was a cluster of low buildings. The Doctor took back the telescope and looked again. ‘A typical medieval scene. The protective castle, with village dwellings huddled around it like ducklings around their mother.’

‘K9 said there were signs of high technology!’

‘Well, computers aren’t infallible.’

‘Sshh Doctor! You’ll hurt his feelings.’

The Doctor grinned, and went back inside the TARDIS. ‘It’s awfully nice out there, K9, fine summer’s day, a castle and a village. Romana and I are just going to take a look.’ K9 glided forward eagerly. ‘Not you, old chap, you’d better stay here.’

K9’s tail antenna drooped.

‘Come on,’ said the Doctor encouragingly. ‘Someone’s got to stay on guard. See if you can compute a method of reverse-transition from existing data. You’ll enjoy doing that, eh?’ And with that, the Doctor was gone.

K9’s tail antenna rose again, and he began whirring and clicking contentedly. There was nothing he liked more than a good, complex calculation.

Behind him an inner door opened just a little and two bright eyes peered cautiously through the crack. K9 was too busy to notice, but he was not alone in the TARDIS...

The Doctor and Romana were skirting the edge of the wood, heading in the general direction of the Village.

There was a stretch of agricultural land just ahead of them, and the Doctor pointed out that it appeared to have been cultivated by hand rather than by machinery.

‘Mind you, just because their way of life appears to be simple, we mustn’t assume they’re primitive or ignorant.

They may have turned away from technology deliberately, opted for a semi-rural culture. It’s always a mistake to judge by appearances.’

A man appeared on the track ahead of them. He was short and squat with grimy, work-worn features, he wore rough homespun garments, and he carried a billhook over his shoulder. He was trudging along, head down and did not notice the Doctor and Romana until he was nearly upon them. Then he jumped back, his face twisting with alarm.

‘Hullo!’ said the Doctor cheerfully. ‘I wonder if you could help us. We

were just—'

Terrified, the man backed away. He touched ears, eyes and mouth in some ritual gesture, then turned and fled into the forest.

'Why didn't you ask him some questions, Doctor?' said Romana mischieviously. 'You mustn't judge by appearances, you know. He was probably their Astronomer Royal!'

The Doctor chuckled. 'I didn't even have time to ask him the name of his tailor!'

They went on their way. Romana said, 'Did you notice that sign he made?'

The Doctor nodded. 'Some kind of ritual gesture to ward off evil.'

'What evil?'

'Well, us at that particular moment. You know, Romana, I've a feeling they're not too used to strangers here.'

In the Centre, a few peasants were dawdling over their bowls of gruel, watched impatiently by Habris and Ivo.

'Get a move on, you lot,' yelled Ivo. 'You'll be late getting back to the fields.'

Scraping the last few drops of gruel from their bowls, the last of the stragglers shuffled out, and Habris and Ivo resumed their conversation.

'Increase the food allowance and you'll get better results,' said Ivo. 'They're too weak to work any harder.'

Almost everything the Village produced went to the Tower, leaving the villagers just enough to survive.

'I'm the one who has to report to the Tower,' said Habris. 'Am I supposed to tell Them they're taking too much?'

'You're the one who has to tell Them about poor harvests, too,' Ivo pointed out unsympathetically. It was an old argument between them, never resolved.

'I'll see what I can do,' growled Habris. 'But I can promise nothing.'

‘That’s what you said about my son.’

‘He was taken to the Lords, with the others. That’s all I know. When there’s news, I’ll tell you.’

‘News!’ said Ivo disgustedly. ‘When is there ever news?’

‘Hullo,’ said a cheerful voice behind them.

They turned and saw the Doctor and Romana in the doorway.

‘You’re not from the Village,’ said Ivo in astonishment.

Habris, too, was amazed. ‘Or from the Tower!’

‘That’s right,’ said Romana brightly. ‘We’re strangers.’

It isn’t possible,’ muttered Ivo. ‘There is only the Tower and the Village, nowhere else. How can you be here?’

Habris decided to take no chances. It was obvious that these two were not peasants or guards — which meant they must be Lords. He stepped forward and bowed stiffly. ‘My Lord, how may I serve you? I am Habris, Captain of the Guard.’

The Doctor looked at him in astonishment. ‘How may you serve me?’

‘I am at my Lord’s command.’

The Doctor decided to take advantage of his unexpected status. ‘We were just wondering if there happened to be any scientists in your charming village?’ Habris and Ivo exchanged looks of utter horror. It was almost as though the Doctor had asked after sorcerers or black magicians.

The Doctor looked at their appalled faces. Perhaps if he used some more primitive term... ‘Witch-wiggler?’ he said hopefully. ‘Wangatur? Mundanugu? Fortuneteller?’

Ivo shook his head vigorously. ‘Such things are forbidden. We know nothing of them here.’

Habris gulped and backed away. ‘If you will excuse me, my Lord. My duties...’

He edged past them and fled through the door.

The Doctor said, ‘I take it you don’t get many strangers here?

‘Strangers?’ repeated Ivo stupidly.

‘Yes. Visitors. Foreign devils. People you don’t know.’

‘Everyone here is known.’

‘What about people from the next village?’ asked Romana. ‘Or the nearest town?’

‘There is only the Village and the Tower. Nowhere else.’

‘Who lives in this Tower of yours?’ asked the Doctor.

‘Why do you ask what everyone must know?’ shouted Ivo in sudden anger. ‘Are you sent to test me? I am Ivo, headman of the Village, like my father before me, and his father before him. The Lords know I am loyal.’

‘There’s no need to shout,’ said the Doctor soothingly.

‘So you serve the Lords, do you? Splendid, I’m sure. And what do the Lords do for you?’

‘They protect us—from the evil that stalks the night.’

Ivo made the ritual gesture the Doctor had seen before.

He turned away. ‘You must go elsewhere with your questions. I have work to do.’

By now Romana was convinced that they had stumbled on the village idiot. ‘Come on, Doctor, this is silly. We’re just wasting time.’

The Doctor lingered for a moment longer. ‘One last question, Ivo. These Lords of yours, how long have they ruled over you?’

‘Forever,’ said Ivo dully. He turned away.

The Doctor rubbed his chin. ‘Forever, eh? That’s a very long time.’

The Doctor turned and followed Romana from the Centre.

As soon as he was gone, Ivo hurried over to the door and opened a hidden locker in the wall beside it. He produced a small black hand-communicator, pressed the call button and held it to his lips. ‘Kalmar?

Kalmar can you hear me?'

There was a brief distorted crackle of response.

'Two strangers, here in the Village,' said Ivo urgently.

The device gave a crackle of astonishment.

'That's right, strangers,' repeated Ivo. 'And Kalmar —

they were asking about scientists!'

3

The Stowaway

By now K9 was happily absorbed in his calculations — but not so absorbed that he did not hear a stealthy footstep behind him. He spun round, extruding his nose-blaster.

'Halt!'

Standing frozen before him, one foot poised off the ground, was a small, round-faced, dark-haired youth who looked strangely familiar.

'Your presence here unauthorised,' said K9 severely.

'Explain.'

'You remember me,' said the young man cheerfully.

'Adric?'

K9 scanned his memory banks. They had encountered Adric on the last planet they had visited. 'Immature humanoid, non-hostile.' He retracted his blaster.

'That's better!'

'Your presence is still unauthorised. Explain!'

'I stowed away.'

'Stowed what away?'

'Myself. I'm a stowaway.'

Again K9 scanned his data bank. 'Stowaway. One who hides in a ship

to obtain free passage.'

'I thought I'd join up with the Doctor and see the universe. Where are we?'

'On an unidentified planet on what the Doctor refers to as E-Space.'

' *What* space?'

'E-Space. The term is used to distinguish it from the normal or N-Space from which we originated.'

'Oh, I see,' said Adric, not seeing at all.

'The concepts are unfamiliar to me. The Doctor will explain.'

'Where is he?'

'The Doctor and Mistress Romana have gone in search of astro-navigational data. Their journey was dangerous and ill-advised. As soon as I have finished my calculations, I shall go and rescue them.'

'Just you stay there and get on with your sums,' said Adric hurriedly. 'I'll go and find them.'

'Stop! Your journey is also dangerous and unnecessary.'

Adric looked thoughtfully at the little automaton. He had no intention of hanging about in the TARDIS while the Doctor and Romana had all the fun. But he knew K9

was quite capable of setting his blaster to stun and shoot him down — purely for his own good, of course.

Adric thought fast. 'Now listen, I'm a stowaway, right?

And that means I shouldn't be here at all.'

'Correct.'

'Then the sooner I leave the better! Just let me out will you ?'

K9 operated the remote control and Adric headed for the door. He paused in the doorway and gave K9 a cheeky grin. 'Gotcha!' he said, and disappeared.

The Doctor and Romana were following a path through the shadowy

depths of the forest. ‘There’s something going on here,’ the Doctor said thoughtfully. ‘Something very odd indeed.’

‘Just a standard medieval culture, Doctor. Repressive aristocracy and terrified peasants.’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘It’s more than that. The situation is more complicated than you think.’

‘How far are we going anyway?’

‘Oh just to the next village.’

‘But there isn’t a next village—or so they said.’

A high-pitched chittering sound came from the gloomy shadows above their heads.

‘What’s that noise ?’

‘Sounds like bats. They come out at dusk, you know.’

The Doctor stopped and looked indignantly down at Romana. ‘What do you mean, there isn’t another village?

There’s got to be another village somewhere—’ He broke off. ‘Just a minute though, maybe you’re right. Remember K9’s orbital scan? That settlement was the only one to show up on it.’

Romana was staring ahead of them. ‘Doctor, look!’

A grey-cloaked, grey-hooded figure had appeared at the end of the path looking incredibly sinister and ghostlike in the gathering shadows.

The Doctor heard a rustle behind him and spun round.

Another hooded figure had appeared on the path behind them. More came out of the woods on either side. They were surrounded.

Warily the Doctor watched the approaching figures.

They were armed with staves and pikes and cudgels —

primitive weapons, but enough to make resistance impossible, at least for the moment. As always, the Doctor’s overriding feeling was one of curiosity. Here was yet another aspect of life on this strange planet,

and he wanted to know more about it.

'Doctor, say something!' hissed Romana.

With a welcoming smile, the Doctor said, 'How do you do? I'm the Doctor and this is Romana.'

No answer. The hooded figures moved closer.

The Doctor tried again. 'We were just passing your charming planet, and we thought we'd drop in, take a look around. Look, I know this may seem a silly question, but I was just wondering if you could tell me anything about the nature of E-Space? Oh well, perhaps not...'

The hooded figures closed in. Ignoring all the Doctor's attempts at conversation or explanation, they seized the Doctor and Romana by the arms and hustled them away through the forest.

Habris quailed beneath the savage anger in Zargo's voice.

'Vanished? What do you mean, vanished?'

As before, Zargo and Camilla were on the twin thrones, Aukon standing between them.

This time Habris had good reason to be afraid. He was the bearer of disturbing news, and the Lords were not pleased. 'I returned to the Village with a patrol, as you ordered, Lord Zargo. Not a moment was wasted. But the strangers had vanished. We searched the Village, we scoured the surrounding woods, but there was no trace of them.'

Zargo stroked his beard. 'They had no time to travel far, no friends to hide them...' He stared at Camilla in sudden alarm. 'Unless they made contact with the rebels.'

'Strangers,' said Camilla broodingly. 'Strangers at a time like this.' She turned angrily to Habris. 'Why did you yourself not seize them as soon as they appeared?'

'I had no orders, my Lady.' Habris hesitated. 'And besides...'

'Well?'

'There was something about them. They were no peasants, that I swear. They were — Lords.'

'We are your Lords, Habris,' said Zargo fiercely. 'There are no others.'

Habris fell to his knees. ‘Forgive me, my Lord, I meant no disrespect.’

Zargo waved him to his feet. ‘More patrols, immediately, Habris. They must be found.’

‘At once, my Lord.’ Thankful for a chance to redeem himself, Habris bowed low, and turned to leave.

Aukon said, ‘Wait!’

The quiet word froze Habris in his tracks. ‘Master?’

‘I will discover the whereabouts of these mysterious strangers, Habris! You can spare the efforts of your guards.’

Zargo leaned forward on his throne. ‘But strangers, Aukon. And at a time like this! Are you sure?’

As always, Aukon spoke quietly, but every word carried immense authority. ‘If the strangers are still on this planet, my servants will find them.’

Habris shivered. He knew that Aukon referred not to human servants but to his winged messengers of the night

— the bats.

Arms held firmly by their hooded captors, the Doctor and Romana were hustled along secret forest tracks to a point where the woods gave way to wasteland. Soon they reached an area of straggly grassland and bare earth, broken up by oddly shaped mounds overgrown with weeds.

The Doctor looked round. There was something oddly familiar about the desolate landscape. It reminded him of the site of some long-ruined city, where the forces of nature had almost obliterated the signs of civilisation. *Had* the planet once held a technological civilisation? But the area was too small to be the remains of a city. They passed a mound which had been eroded by wind and rain. The surface had fallen away to reveal the angular, rusting shape of some giant machine.

‘It’s a dump, Romana,’ whispered the Doctor. ‘A technological rubbish tip!’

Their hooded captors led the way to another, larger, mound. One of

them hurried forward and opened a hidden door, its surface cunningly camouflaged with grass and weeds.

The door opened onto a downward-sloping tunnel, and the Doctor and Romana were thrust along it until they emerged blinking into a blaze of artificial lights.

Eyes alight with curiosity, the Doctor looked around him. He was in a large, roughly circular chamber, carved, he guessed, out of the heart of the mound, though its walls had been re-inforced with a strange mixture of rusting metal plates and wooden pillars. The room was filled with an amazing assortment of partly dismantled equipment —

control panels, computer terminals, sections of rocket engines, all kinds of machinery, all jumbled together.

Much of the machinery was old and rusting, but some sections were newly cleaned, as if some attempt had been made to get things working again.

All around the edges of the room there were simple living areas, chairs, beds, tables and a scattering of personal possessions. All in all, the place was a strange combination of laboratory, workshop and living quarters.

In the centre of the room one piece of equipment was receiving particular attention. It consisted simply of a battered metal cabinet which incorporated a small vision screen with a row of controls just below it. An inspection panel had been moved from the back and a tubby white-haired old man in a shabby robe was peering rather bemusedly inside.

The Doctor surveyed the extraordinary scene with delighted interest. ‘Well, well, well, quite a technacothaka you’ve got here.’

‘Doctor,’ whispered Romana, ‘what’s a technacothaka?’

‘Well, I *think* it means a museum of technology. On the other hand, I might have made it up!’

During this exchange, the men who had captured them had been stripping off their hooded cloaks, to reveal rough homespun clothing, much like that worn by the peasants they had seen in the Village. But there the resemblance ended. Except for Ivo, the Village peasants had been cowed and apathetic-looking. These men had a fierce, wolfish look about them, the wary alert look of hunted men. These were

outlaws.

Throwing aside his cloak, the tall man shoved his way to the front of the group. ‘Well, we found them, Kalmar!’

The old man blinked up at him. ‘You are sure these are the ones Ivo spoke of, Tarak?’

‘Look at their faces, look at their clothes! They’re the strangers all right, just as Ivo described them. The man calls himself “Doctor”.’

‘Doctor?’ said the old man eagerly. ‘It is a word I have seen in the old records. It is a title used by scientists,’ he spoke the last word with a kind of reverence, looking hopefully at the Doctor. ‘Are you a scientist, Doctor, like me?’

‘Well, I dabble a bit,’ said the Doctor modestly. He wandered over to the metal cabinet and peered inside the inspection hatch.

Tarak watched him suspiciously. ‘He was asking about scientists in the Centre.’ Grabbing the Doctor’s shoulder he spun him round. ‘All right, *Doctor*, it’s time for a few answers.’

‘I suppose you mean: who are we, where do we come from, what do we want? All that old stuff?’

‘It’ll do for a start,’ growled Tarak. ‘Well?’

‘Oh, come on, let’s not talk about me all the time.’ The Doctor waved expansively around him. ‘All this looks much more interesting.’ He turned to Kalmar. ‘I see you’ve actually got some of it working again.’

‘We have a generator,’ said the old man proudly. ‘It gives us power for air, light and heat. We have communicators — ’

‘But no weapons, eh, Kalmar?’ interrupted Tarak harshly.

Kalmar gave him a look of dignified reproof. ‘When we have rediscovered basic scientific principles we shall make weapons, Tarak. These things take time.’

Tarak sank wearily onto a wooden stool. ‘Time!’ he said bitterly. ‘How many of us have lived and died in misery, because everything takes time!’

Romana said, ‘Tell me, how long have things been like this?’

‘Forever!’ Kalmar said, ‘It seems like forever, certainly.

The Lords rule in the Tower, the peasants toil in the fields.

Nothing has changed here for over a thousand years.’

4

The Messengers of Aukon

Adric followed much the same route as the Doctor and Romana when he left the TARDIS, taking the track that led along the edge of the forest, past the ploughed land and into the Village. He saw scattered groups of peasants toiling in the fields, but their heads were bowed over their work and they paid him no attention.

Adric walked up the village street, looking around at the deserted buildings. It was, he thought, as unattractive-looking a place as he had ever seen. He saw the open door of a large building at the end of the street; walked up to it, and slipped cautiously inside.

At first the big room seemed deserted, but the smell of food led his eyes to a kitchen area in the far corner, where he saw a homely middle-aged woman slicing vegetables into a cooking pot. Adric suddenly realised he was very hungry, and his renegade’s instinct urged him to take what he wanted without asking. He probably would not manage to get his hands on any of the stew, but there were big round loaves of brown bread on a table just behind the woman. One of them had been cut into chunks. If he could swipe a piece of bread and a bit of cheese... Adric began sidling mouse-like along the edge of the room.

He reached the kitchen area undetected and was just reaching out for a particularly tasty-looking crust of bread when some instinct made the woman turn round. She grabbed Adric’s wrist with a work-toughened hand and dragged him forward. ‘Got you!’

Adric was just about to launch into a sad tale about being a poor starving orphan, when the woman gave a gasp of horror and thrust him away from her. ‘Who are you?

How did you come here?’

‘I walked,’ said Adric. He hadn’t expected his arrival to make such a big impression.

‘But I don’t *know* you !’

Adric was baffled by the strength of her reaction. ‘That’s all right, I don’t know you either!’

The woman backed away. ‘It isn’t possible...’

Taking advantage of her confusion, Adric grabbed the crust and began gnawing at it hungrily. Through a mouthful of the coarse wholemeal bread he said, ‘I’m looking for two friends of mine. Don’t suppose you’ve seem them, have you? Tall man with curly hair and a silly scarf. There’s a girl with him.’

The woman was still staring at him with a kind of superstitious awe. ‘There were two such strangers here earlier. A Lord and a Lady.’

‘Any idea where they could be?’

The woman shook her head.

Adric heard heavy footsteps behind him and an enormous hand clamped down on his shoulder spinning him round. A very large, very angry man was looming over him. ‘What are you doing, eating my bread? Who are you?’

He shook Adric until his teeth rattled.

The woman said, ‘Don’t hurt him. He says — he’s looking for those two strangers.’

‘I’ve had my fill of strangers today — let him look somewhere else!’ The man began marching Adric towards the door.

The woman ran to bar his way. ‘You can’t send him out there now. It isn’t safe. Let him stay the night at least.

Maybe his friends will come for him.’

Reluctantly the man let Adric go. ‘And what if someone from the Tower comes and finds him here, eh?’

‘What, now? It’s hardly likely, is it?’ The woman took a tattered jerkin from a peg and gave it to Adric. ‘Here, put this on. It belonged to my son.’

‘Whatever you say,’ said Adric obligingly. He slipped into the coat which had been made to fit someone much larger, and huddled inside

it. He looked small and pathetic, and the woman smiled, and ruffled his hair.

'Well, since I'm staying,' said Adric cheerfully. He grabbed another chunk of bread, and began munching it, looking hopefully up at his two new friends. 'I don't suppose you happen to have a bit of cheese?'

Unable to resist the chance to do a bit of tinkering, the Doctor was working on the video unit, watched by Kalmar, Tarak and the other rebels.

Romana looked on impatiently, reflecting that there was enough old technological junk in this place to keep the Doctor happy for years. She just hoped he wasn't going to insist on repairing all of it.

As the Doctor worked, Romana attempted to find out more about the strange society into which they had strayed. 'How did you manage to find this place for your HQ?'

Kalmar sighed, staring into the past. 'It was many years ago, when I was young. Some of us were on the run from Zargo and his men. We escaped into these wastelands and discovered this place. All kinds of wonderful things have been just dumped here, half-hidden. There is even food and drink, piles of it, in special containers that protect it from decay. Gradually, over the years, we built this place up to what you see now.'

'You seem to have done very well.'

'Some of us could still read,' said Kalmar proudly. 'It's forbidden, of course, but the old knowledge was passed on in secret.'

Romana was appalled. 'What? Do you mean to say reading is forbidden?'

Kalmar nodded. ' *All* learning, all science, is forbidden by the Lords. The penalty for knowledge is death.'

'Aren't there any schools? What about the children?'

'They start work in the fields with their parents as soon as they can walk — and go on till they too grow old and die... those that escape Selection.'

'What Selection?'

Tarak said roughly, ‘When the children are nearly full-grown, they become liable for Selection. Those who are chosen are taken to the Tower.’

‘What happens to them?’

‘The strongest of the young men become guards. I was a guard myself, until I rebelled.’

‘And the rest?’

‘They stay in the Tower, and serve the Lords.’

‘Or so it is said,’ added Kalmar darkly. ‘None of them are ever seen again.’

‘I can see you’ve got a lot to rebel against,’ said Romana.

‘But what puzzles me is —’

‘Got it!’ said the Doctor triumphantly. The video screen flickered into life. The Doctor rubbed his hands. ‘Aha!

Now maybe we’ll learn something.’

The screen went dead.

The Doctor’s face fell, as he twiddled unavailingly with the controls. ‘Oh well, I suppose it must be out of guarantee by now. I don’t suppose you’ve got the instruction manual?’

Romana came forward: ‘It’s only a simple Earth-type data bank unit, Doctor, it ought to be easy enough to get it working again. We’ll have to crack the entry code, but—’

She broke off, realising what she had just said. ‘Earth-type, Doctor! This equipment came from Earth!’

The Doctor nodded. ‘That’s right, homely old Earth technology.’ He grinned. ‘ I remember back on Earth, the engineers used to just...’

He thumped the side of the console with his fist — and the screen came to life.

‘Definitely an Earth device,’ said Romana dryly. She adjusted the controls, and computerised lettering filled the little screen. Romana studied it. ‘Seems to be a list of headings: ship’s manifest, cargo, flight

plan from Earth, crew-dossiers — all relating to the exploration vessel *Hydrax* en route from Earth, destination Beta Two in the Perugellis Sector.'

The Doctor said thoughtfully, 'And they finished up here—just like us!'

Romana touched a control and new information began flashing up on the screen. 'Ship's Officer; Captain: Miles Sharkey. Navigation Officer: Lauren Macmillan. Science Officer: Anthony O'Connor.'

The captions were

accompanied by a head-and-shoulders identification portrait — a man, a woman, and another man, all in standard space uniform. The pictures, like the lettering, were blurred.

'The read-out's still quite legible,' said the Doctor. 'Not bad after a thousand years!'

Tarak was staring at the screen in horror. 'Those faces!

They look—familiar!'

'They must all be long-since dead, I'm afraid,' said the Doctor. 'Some family resemblance, perhaps?'

'I was a Tower Guard once, Doctor. I saw *Them* every day.' Tarak peered at the blurred pictures and shook his head. 'But it can't be.'

'Who did you see every day?'

Instinctively, Tarak made the Sign of Protection. 'The Three Who Rule. Lord Zargo, Lady Camilla...'

'That's only two! Who's the third?'

'Aukon, the High Councillor.' Tarak shook his head as if to clear it. 'I'm sorry, I see their faces everywhere. They haunt me.'

'Do they? Why?'

Tarak said grimly, 'If you knew Them, Doctor, you would understand.'

The Doctor said, 'I think it's time I got to know them.

Come along, Romana.'.

Belatedly Tarak remembered that the Doctor and Romana were supposed to be

prisoners under

interrogation. Somehow it seemed that they had been asking all the questions.

He turned to Kalmar. ‘We still don’t know anything about these people. They’re supposed to be our prisoners

— or have you forgotten that?’

‘I shall give the Doctor my trust,’ said the old man with dignity. ‘He is a scientist, as I am, and I believe him to be our friend.’

‘But Kalmar, we should keep them prisoner, question them...’

‘No,’ snapped Kalmar. ‘While I lead, I shall make the decisions. Doctor, you are free to go!’

‘Thank you, Kalmar,’ said the Doctor quietly. ‘Now, I wonder if you’d be kind enough to direct me to the Tower?’

Some time later, following Kalmar’s directions, they struck the path that would lead them to the Tower.

Romana glanced around uneasily. ‘ It seems to be getting dark very suddenly!’

A strange dusk was falling, a dusk with a kind of greenish tinge to it.

The Doctor shrugged. ‘Night must fall, Romana, even in E-Space.’

Romana shivered. ‘It doesn’t feel natural somehow.’ She looked up as a high-pitched chittering sound came from somewhere overhead. ‘There’s that noise again.’

‘It’s only bats,’ said the Doctor carelessly. ‘I told you, they’re quite harmless.’

Something swooped out of the darkness, struck at his neck, and fluttered swiftly away.

‘Ouch!’ said the Doctor indignantly, and put his hand to his neck. It came. away wet with his own blood.

He rubbed the tiny puncture-wound. ‘Well, they’re *supposed* to be harmless, in theory. That one was a bit carnivorous.’

‘Do you think we might get a move on?’ suggested Romana nervously.

They hurried on their way. The sky grew darker by the minute.

Romana glanced up and caught her breath in surprise.

‘Doctor, look!’

A long ribbon of winged shapes — bats — was streaming across the darkening sky.

‘Run!’ shouted the Doctor.

They ran — and the bats pursued them.

They sped across the sky in a swirling cloud, hovering just behind the Doctor and Romana as they ran. Every now and again a bat would swoop down to the attack. The Doctor swatted at them with his hat and Romana screamed as one of the creatures became tangled in her hair.

The Doctor knocked it away and they ran on — and on.

If they halted, or even slowed, more bats would swoop down to the attack. It was as if they were being herded, thought the Doctor suddenly — the bats were driving them, strangely enough in the direction they wished to go.

Towards the Tower.

As they ran along the edge of a dank and gloomy lake, Romana’s ankle turned beneath her and she fell.

The Doctor knelt beside her, trying to help her to get up. ‘It’s no good,’ gasped Romana. ‘I won’t be able to walk for a bit, let alone run.’

The Doctor bent to lift her up, and Romana screamed. ‘Look, Doctor, look!’

The sky was black with bats. The chittering rose to an angry shriek as the swirling cloud hovered for a moment, then swooped down towards them.

The Tower

The Doctor straightened up, and stood over Romana, preparing to protect her as best he could. There was nothing else to do, he couldn't hope to outrun them now, not carrying Romana.

The swarm of bats swooped down — and then up again, past them and away, disappearing into the darkened sky.

Puzzled by the unexpected reprieve, the Doctor looked around — and found himself gazing straight at a grim-faced figure in black. It was Habris, the Guard Captain he had encountered at the Centre, and there were more guards with him.

Habris bowed with sinister politeness and said,

'Greetings, my Lord, my Lady. I have been sent to meet you. You are awaited in the Tower.'

Romana's ankle was turned rather than actually twisted, and after a few minutes' rest she was able to walk normally again. By the time they reached their destination, the sinister green twilight had receded and the Tower's ivy-covered walls were basking peacefully in the rays of the late-afternoon sun. They were marched through a great arched doorway into the darkness of the Tower. Habris led them up a long spiral staircase, along a gloomy corridor, and finally through a set of double doors at which stood more armed guards.

'You will wait here, please. Do not move!'

Habris bowed and withdrew. The doors closed behind him.

Romana and the Doctor looked round. They were in a huge circular chamber, walls decorated with rich and sombre hangings. On a raised dais at the far end were twin thrones, side by side. The whole place had an atmosphere of gloomy splendour, and was obviously some kind of formal state room.

Yet there was something odd about it too, thought Romana, something incongruous, as though the room had originally been designed for some other purpose altogether.

The Doctor, too, seemed puzzled by his surroundings.

Disregarding Habris's order to stay put, he began prowling about the room. 'Funny about the windows.'

‘There aren’t any windows.’

‘Exactly!’ said the Doctor. ‘And then there’s the general architectural style. Rococco, would you call it?’

‘No, I wouldn’t.’

‘Neither would I’ The Doctor rapped one of the walls with his knuckles, then knelt and did the same to the floor.

He looked up at the puzzled Romana. ‘Just testing a theory.’

Looking over the Doctor’s shoulder, Romana gave a sudden gasp of horror.

The Doctor straightened up, and turned round. Two figures stood before the twin thrones. Presumably they had come through some hidden door, but the general effect was as if they had materialised from nowhere.

There was a man and a woman, both tall and thin, with white faces and glittering black eyes, both gorgeously robed. They reminded him of something, thought the Doctor, and suddenly he realised what it was. The King and Queen, on a pack of old-fashioned Earth playing-cards.

They came forward, moving in unison with a curious gliding motion.

The man said, ‘Greetings.’ His voice was cold with a kind of hissing quality. ‘I am Lord Zargo. This is the Lady Camilla.’

The Doctor bowed. ‘How do you do? I’m the Doctor and this is Romana.’

‘We know who you are,’ said the woman. Her voice had the same icy sibilance as her companion’s. ‘We know everything here.’

‘Gosh!’ said the Doctor apparently awe-struck. ‘That’s most impressive.’

‘Almost everything,’ said Zargo. ‘What we do not know is *why* you are here.’

‘Oh, ah, well, we got lost, you see,’ said the Doctor vaguely. ‘So we landed here to ask for directions. We were just admiring your Tower—weren’t we just admiring the Tower, Romana?’

Romana nodded silently, and thought that when the Doctor started babbling nonsensically like this it was a sign he was very worried.

Romana was worried, too. There was something very sinister about this Lord and Lady.

'The Tower was built many generations ago,' said Camilla dismissively. 'Before living memory.'

The Doctor looked strangely at her. 'Before living memory... are you sure?'

Camilla's eyes widened in alarm.

'You are space travellers,' said Zargo flatly. It was a statement, not a question.

'That doesn't surprise you?' asked Romana.

'Nothing surprises us. A little refreshment?'

He gestured towards a side table, which bore crystal glasses and a jug of wine. Camilla glided towards the table and poured wine for all of them, passing round the glasses.

There was food on the table, too, a platter piled high with sliced meats. Camilla offered the plate to Romana, who saw that the meat was so undercooked as to be almost raw. She declined politely; so did the Doctor. Camilla returned the plate to the table, and picked up her glass.

Zargo raised his glass. 'To our visitors. May you enjoy your stay here —'

'As we shall enjoy having you,' concluded Camilla.

There was something very sinister about her smile.

The Doctor glanced round the State Room. 'Well, you certainly do very well for yourselves here.'

'We struggle to retain some remnants of civilised life. Of course, on a primitive planet like this, it isn't easy.'

The Doctor took an appreciative sip of his wine. 'Not unlike Bulls' Blood, I fancy.' His voice hardened. 'Still, you do considerably better than the peasants.'

‘The peasants are simple folk,’ said Camilla coldly.

‘Richer fare would only distress them.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘Quite right, probably give ‘em indigestion. There’s nothing worse than a peasant with indigestion, makes them quite rebellious. Have any trouble that way?’

‘There are always a few ungrateful ones who do not appreciate all we do for them.’

Romana found the complacent superiority in her tone extremely irritating. ‘And what do you do for them? Apart from saving them from gluttony?’

‘We protect them. There are many dangers on this planet.’

There was a moment’s awkward silence. ‘Ah well, toodle-ooh!’ said the Doctor, returning Zargo’s toast, and clinked glasses with Romana. He did it a little too enthusiastically, and the crystal goblet in Romana’s hand shattered in pieces. ‘Ouch,’ said Romana. Dropping the remains of her glass, she put her finger in her mouth, sucking a tiny cut.

Camilla was staring at her with strange intentness.

‘You’ve hurt yourself. Let me see!’ She reached out and grasped Romana’s wrist. ‘Please, let me see!’

Romana snatched her hand away. ‘It’s nothing, really!

There’s no need to make such a fuss about a few drops of blood.’

Zargo gave Camilla a warring glance and said abruptly,

‘You still haven’t told us how you came to be here, Doctor?’

‘Bad luck, mostly,’ said Romana.

‘Well, we went a bit off course,’ said the Doctor.

‘About a universe off course,’ muttered Romana.

‘As a matter of fact,’ said the Doctor, ‘we were hoping you would tell us how you got here — and better still, how to get back!’

‘I fear we cannot help you,’ said Zargo smoothly. ‘Our legends say we

came from a distant planet called Earth.'

'We can never return home,' said Camilla. 'The technology is lost.'

'Such a pity.'

Camilla was still staring intently at Romana. 'Yes, indeed, Doctor, a great pity. However, there are —

compensations!'

Adric was helping Marta to serve the evening meal, and trying to glean as much information as he could at the same time. 'So every so often, these guards just turn up, sort out some of the young people and march them off to this Tower?'

Marta scraped the bottom of the pot and ladled out a meagre portion of the thin stew. Adric passed the plate to a waiting peasant who snatched it and carried it off to the tables. He was the last in line; by now the tables were filled with silently eating peasants, all apparently determined to scour every drop of food from their plates.

Marta began clearing away the pots. 'It is the Selection,'

she said, answering Adric's question. 'It is the custom.'

'And what happens to them? Do they become guards?'

'A few,' Marta's face twisted with grief. 'At the last Selection they took our son.'

Adric was baffled. 'Why do you stand for it?'

Marta shrugged hopelessly. 'It is the custom. It is our place to serve, to obey the Lords. Besides, resistance is useless. My son Karl tried to run, but they took him just the same. We haven't seen him since then...'

Ivo came up to them in time to hear her last few words.

'Karl will be chosen as a guard. Habris said he would help us.'

'Well, I reckon someone should stand up to these people in the Tower,' said Adric indignantly.

'Be silent,' growled Ivo. 'Those who speak or act against them die silently by night.'

Marts lowered her voice. ‘There are rumours of a band of rebels in the wastelands. Our son Karl wanted to run off and join them.’

‘Enough woman,’ said Ivo gruffly. ‘And you, boy, get on with scouring those pots. If your luck holds the guards won’t notice you.’

Adric surveyed the pile of pots with distaste. ‘Look, you’ve been very good to me, both of you, and I’m grateful.

But I’m not exactly planning on settling down here, you know. If the Doctor doesn’t turn up soon, I shall go and look for him.’

Marta clutched at his arm, as if he was a second son that she feared she might lose. ‘No! You must stay here.’

‘Why? What can I do here?’

‘Survive,’ said Ivo grimly. ‘If you’re lucky.’

‘That’s right,’ said Marta bitterly. ‘Survive. Work, sleep, serve the Lords faithfully and well, and they’ll allow you to live till you die, worn out. That’s all there is for us.’

Adric was appalled. ‘Not for me,’ he said firmly.

The doors burst open and Habris marched in, a squad of guards at his heels. ‘All right,’ he barked. ‘Into line. All of you, this time.’

The guards began shoving the astonished peasants, forming them into a line down the centre of the hall.

Ivo grabbed Habris by the shoulder. ‘What are you doing, Hubris? We’ve just had a Selection.’

‘Well, you’re having another.’

‘So soon?’ protested Marta. ‘It’s against all custom.’

‘The orders come from the Tower. Lord Aukon himself is here. Do you wish to argue with him?’ Habris caught sight of Adric. ‘You, get over with the others.’

Reluctantly Adric found himself a place in the centre of the line. He didn’t want to draw attention to himself by making a fuss. Maybe there would be safety in numbers, he thought.

Suddenly the room was completely silent. A man was standing in the

doorway. He was nothing very impressive to look at, thought Adric. Medium size, a plain robe, a fringe of beard. Then Adric caught sight of the deep-set burning eyes, and hurriedly revised his opinion. This man positively radiated power.

Aukon walked slowly along the straggling line, pausing to stare intently at everyone in turn. Each time he moved on, as if he had not found what he was looking for. Halfway down the line he came to Adric, who stared blankly at him.

His glance flicked briefly over the boy, and Aukon passed on. Then he stopped, paused and came back to Adric, staring deep into his eyes. 'Interesting. A mind that shields itself. One who pretends to be a dull and stupid peasant, but who is — different.'

Adric looked up at him with big, round eyes. 'Who me?'

'You. You will come with me.'

'Why?' said Adric boldly.

There was a murmur of horror from the peasants.

Aukon smiled. 'You have spirit, too, I see. Excellent.

Now, come.'

'Why should I come with you?' persisted Adric. 'What's in it for me?'

Aukon came closer, staring deep into Adric's eyes until the burning eyes seemed to swallow up his will.

'Wealth,' whispered Aukon. 'Power. Dominion over this world—and many others. Come!'

Walking like someone in a trance, Adric followed Aukon from the Centre.

6

Tarak's Plan

Their little chat with Lord Zargo and Lady Camilla, thought Romana, was turning out to be one of the least successful social occasions of all time.

The Doctor seemed to have taken a positive dislike to his two hosts

and was showing his feelings by a series of increasingly tactless remarks. At this particular moment he was striding up and down the State Room, lecturing Zargo and Camilla about the problems of the society over which they ruled. ‘Surely you realise that something here is wrong?’

Zargo did not care for the Doctor’s tone. ‘Wrong, Doctor?’

‘Yes. Something is very definitely wrong.’

‘What is — is,’ said Camilla, as if that explained everything.

‘Ah yes,’ said the Doctor argumentatively. ‘But what *is*

— is wrong. Look, societies develop in varying ways, but they all develop. Yours seems to be sliding back into some sort of primitivism. Don’t you agree, Romana?’

‘Oh yes. In terms of applied socio-energetics, it’s losing its grip on level-two development. A society that evolves backwards must be subject to some exceptionally powerful force.’

‘Some exceptionally powerful force,’ repeated the Doctor.

Zargo frowned. ‘How very mysterious, Doctor.’

‘Mysterious or not, the rebels seem to think that power emanates from this Tower — from you.’

‘They flatter us,’ said Camilla.

‘After all,’ said Zargo smoothly. ‘In any society there is bound to be a division between the rulers and the ruled.’

‘A division!’ The Doctor was indignant. ‘More of a yawning chasm, I’d say, wouldn’t you, Romana?’

‘I’d say a sociopathic abscess, to be precise.’

‘A very good diagnosis, couldn’t have put it better myself. Yes, a sociopathic abscess. I’ve never seen such a state of decay.’

‘Be careful, Doctor,’ hissed Camilla. ‘We have acquired great powers.’

‘After all, there must *be* rulers,’ said Zargo in a tone of forced reasonableness. ‘The ship of state must have its pilot.’

The Doctor stared at Zargo as if some great light had suddenly dawned. ‘ *What* did you say? The ship of state?’

Camilla caught her breath, and suddenly Zargo seemed uneasy. ‘Merely a metaphor, Doctor.’

‘Ah, I see. Only it’s odd you should mention a ship, because Romana and I have just been looking at an old ship’s manifest. I can’t seem to remember what the ship was called. Do you remember, Romana?’

‘ *Hydrax*.’

‘That’s right — *Hydrax*.’ The Doctor. swung round on Zargo and Camilla. ‘Does that name mean anything to you

— *Hydrax*?’

It was clear from Zargo’s reaction that it meant a great deal. ‘Where did you see this manifest? Those old records were all destroyed—’

‘Be silent,’ ordered Camilla, and it was suddenly clear that she was by far the stronger of the two.

‘Please, don’t be silent,’ urged the Doctor. ‘It’s all rather fascinating.’

Zargo stared at him white-faced, but made no reply.

They were interrupted by Habris who marched into the room and bowed before the twin thrones. ‘My Lord, my Lady—’

Camilla rounded on him. ‘How dare you break in on us!’ Habris’s excitement overcame his fear. ‘My Lord, it is time! Lord Aukon has seen the sign. The Time of Arising is at hand.’

‘Leave us,’ ordered Camilla. ‘Tell Lord Aukon we will join him immediately.’

Habris bowed again, and hurried away.

Camilla turned to her guests. ‘We shall resume this discussion soon, Doctor—and next time we will ask the questions. There are guards outside the door. Many guards.’

Zargo and Camilla swept out. Thoughtfully the Doctor watched them go. ‘Let’s take a seat, shall we, Romana?’

Coolly he wandered over to Zargo’s throne and sat down. Feeling

rather foolish, Romana came and sat beside him.

The Doctor yawned and stretched. ‘Ah, yes, this is much more comfortable. What were the names of the *Hydrax*’s ship’s officers?’

‘Captain: Miles Sharkey. Navigation Officer: Lauren Macmillan. Science Officer: Anthony O’Connor.’

The Doctor brooded for a moment. ‘Ever heard of the Brothers Grimm?’

‘This is no time for fairy stories, Doctor.’

‘They didn’t just write fairy stories, they discovered the Law of Consonantal Shift, the way language changes down the centuries.’

Romana wasn’t to be outdone on points of scholarship.

‘Oh yes, I remember, b’s to v’s, that kind of thing?’

‘Exactly. And over a thousand years, Macmillan could become... ?’ The Doctor paused encouragingly.

‘Of course! Camilla!’

‘And O’Connor...?’

‘Aukon.’

‘That’s right. And Sharkey, of course, turns into Zargo.’

‘You mean the names have been passed down through generations? Zargo and Camilla are descendants of the original ship’s officers!’

‘Well, that’s one explanation,’ said the Doctor evasively.

‘And then there’s this Tower of theirs... Take a look round this room, Romana, what does it remind you off?’ The Doctor patted his throne. ‘Pilot’s seat here, co-pilot’s seat next to it. Instrument banks there, control panels there. All been ripped out and dumped, of course.’

‘You mean this Tower is *Hydrax*, the original explorer ship?’

‘Yes. What do you say we explore it?’ The Doctor jumped up and started prowling round the walls of the room.

‘What are you looking for?’

‘You saw the way those two just popped up — there’s got to be another entrance somewhere.’ The Doctor began rapping walls, looking for a secret door.

Romana had a sudden inspiration. She got off her throne and began examining it. She lifted the drapes that covered the back and found a small hatch beneath the chair. ‘I thought so—an inspection hatch.’

Romana

touched a control and the hatch-cover slid open, revealing a kind of metal chimney, with a ladder fixed to the side.

‘Doctor!’

‘Sssh, I’m busy,’ said the Doctor severely. He completed his study of the wall, came back to the thrones, noticed the open hatchway, and promptly squeezed himself through it.

After a moment his head popped out. ‘Come on, Romana, what are you waiting for? I’ve found the inspection hatch!’

‘Yes, Doctor,’ said Romana patiently, and followed him through.

In the caves below the Tower there was an altar. Adric stood before it, gazing blankly into space. Grouped around him stood Aukon, Zargo and Camilla.

Camilla stared hungrily at the boy. ‘Where did you find him, Aukon?’

‘When my servants were seeking the Doctor and his companion, I sensed the presence of another alien mind not far away. I traced it to the Village, and here he is — the Chosen One.’

‘But he is an alien,’ insisted Zargo. ‘He must have come to this planet with the two strangers.’

Camilla said, ‘Surely the Chosen One was to be found amongst the peasants?’

Aukon shrugged. ‘We have bred dullness, conformity, and obedience into those clods for generations.

Unfortunately, we have bred out just those qualities needed in the Chosen One.’

Zargo shook his head. ‘I do not like this, Aukon. It disturbs me. I have

been talking to the Doctor and his companion. The Doctor's mind is powerful, but he is dangerous. I sense it. He must die. We should kill the boy, too. We need no aliens to join us.' He drew his dagger and put it to Adric's throat. 'Let him feed the Great One with his blood.'

Aukon thrust the dagger aside. 'I tell you the boy is valuable. He is young, his mind is strong and clear but still malleable. We can make of him what we wish.'

Camilla came forward. 'Aukon is right. What does it matter where he comes from? Once he is initiated, he is ours! We must find the Chosen One as the Great One commanded, or he will be angry.' She stroked Adric's hair.

'Besides, he is such a handsome child. It would be a pity to waste him.'

Aukon took Adric's arm. 'I will take him to be prepared.

Come!' Unresisting, Adric allowed himself to be led away.

Kalmar had just received a communicator message from Ivo in the village. He looked despairingly around his fellow rebels. 'Ivo says they are all three taken. They are captives in the Tower.'

It was Tarak who broke the gloomy silence. 'What are we going to do about it?'

'What can we do?'

'This Doctor is our only gleam of hope in a thousand years. Are we going to let Zargo and those others destroy him?'

'Maybe they won't harm him,' said Kalmar feebly.

'They'll kill him, Kalmar, him and the boy and the girl as well. You know their powers. The Lords will sense that the strangers are a danger to them, and they'll destroy them.'

'Perhaps. But what can we do? The fate of the Doctor and his friends is out of our hands now.'

'It needn't be.'

'What can we do?'

'Attack the Tower,' said Tarak fiercely. 'Rescue them.'

Kalmar looked round the little group. ‘A handful of us, with knives and bows and spears? With the blasters of the guards to deal with — and the powers of the Three to face if we get past them?’

Tarak gave the video console a great blow with his fist.

‘Will you stay here in this hole forever, fiddling with your technological junk?’

Kalmar was unmoved. ‘We need knowledge to attack the Lords. We must wait until we are ready.’

‘For how long?’ asked Tarak bitterly. ‘A few more generations?’

‘If necessary, yes.’

Tarak looked at the others. ‘What about the rest of you?

Will anyone come with me to the Tower?’ Tarak turned to his closest friend, a tough, wiry man called Veros. ‘What about you?’

For a moment Veros looked tempted, then he shook his head. ‘Kalmar is right. It’s too soon.’

‘Too soon!’ Tarak turned away in disgust. He stood brooding for a moment, and then turned back to Kalmar.

‘You’re right, Kalmar.’

Kalmar was puzzled. ‘I am? How unlike you to admit it.’

‘To make a mass attack on the Tower now would be suicide.’

‘I’m glad you realise it.’

‘But suppose I go in alone, and rescue the Doctor? He’ll have discovered their weaknesses, and he has the knowledge we need to make weapons. Then will you attack?’

‘It is possible,’ said Kalmar cautiously. ‘If the Doctor will agree to help us... How will you gain entrance to the Tower?’

With a grim smile, Tarak said, ‘I was a Tower guard once, remember? I can always be one again.’

Zargo glared angrily round the empty State Room. ‘Where are they?’

Habris backed away in terror. ‘I swear to you, my Lord, the door was heavily guarded at all times.’

‘Then where are the Doctor and the girl?’

‘They are aliens,’ babbled Habris. ‘Who knows what strange powers they may have. Some alien magic.’

‘Do not be absurd. They have no powers, and moreover they are weaponless. Find them, Habris, or I swear you shall go to feed the Great One before nightfall. Search the Tower, and search the lands all around.’

‘At once, my Lord.’

Habris fled in terror.

Camilla meanwhile was inspecting the twin thrones.

‘You are wrong!’

‘Wrong? About what?’

‘About the Doctor being weaponless.’ Camilla beckoned, and Zargo moved to stand beside her. She pointed to the drape, which was still pulled back to reveal the hatch-cover. ‘I think the Doctor has the greatest weapon of all —

knowledge.’

Zargo’s eyes glowed red with anger. ‘We must find him.

The Doctor and his companion must be found — and killed!’

7

The Secret Horror

The Doctor and Romana were climbing, endlessly climbing, up and up and up, until Romana began to feel there was nothing real in the world but the Doctor’s bootsoles receding above her.

They came at last onto a metal platform, where the main ladder divided into three small ones.

Choosing the central one, the Doctor climbed up it, opened a small hatchway, and emerged into a tiny circular control room, jammed

with instruments.

Romana squeezed through beside him and looked around her. She looked up to the roof, which rose to a sharply pointed dome. ‘We must be right inside one of those turrets at the very top.’

‘We’re inside an arrow class scout ship,’ corrected the Doctor. ‘It detaches from the main vessel for local exploration.’

‘I wonder why they didn’t rip out all these instruments, too?’

‘Why bother? No-one ever comes here. Perhaps they thought they’d need it some day.’ The Doctor jabbed a control at random, and a needle quivered on a dial. ‘Look, there’s even a bit of power left in the energy cells.’

‘Could it still fly?’

‘Possibly — not very far, though.’

‘Far enough to get us clear of the Tower, and back to the TARDIS?’

‘Getting away from the Tower isn’t the point, Romana.

Not till we find out what’s going on here.’

Not for the first time, Romana thought that the Doctor’s insatiable curiosity would be the death of him, and very probably of her as well.

Suddenly the Doctor cocked his head. ‘Sssh! Listen!’

Romana listened. There was a kind of thump-thump, thump-thump, coming from somewhere below. ‘It could be engine noise...’

‘I don’t think so.’

‘What is it, then?’

‘More evidence,’ said the Doctor mysteriously.

‘Evidence of what?’

‘Something too horrible to think about. Come on!’

‘Where are we going now?’

‘Down!’

The Doctor disappeared through the hatch.

Tarak found it easy enough to elude the patrols around the Tower. They had followed the same set routes for as long as he could remember.

There was a small rear entrance used for carrying in the endless supplies that fed the Tower. Tarak knew from experience that it was often left unguarded between patrols. Choosing his moment carefully, he slipped inside, and moved along a narrow service corridor.

He was hurrying towards the ramp that led to the upper areas, when he heard rapid footsteps. Tarak ducked into a storage area and waited.

A guard came hurrying along the corridor, presumably the rear-door sentry, heading belatedly for his post As the guard passed the door to the storage area, Tarak sprang out behind him, slid an arm around his throat and dragged him inside. There was a choking sound—then silence.

A few minutes later, Tarak came out of the storage room, adjusting the belt of A long-unfamiliar uniform.

Marching along with an air of brisk military efficiency, he headed for the upper levels.

The Doctor and Romana, however, were going not up but down. Having been to the very top of the ship, the Doctor now seemed determined to reach the very bottom. Instead of his boot-soles, Romana now had the seemingly unending view of the top of his head. But, the ladder came to an end at last and the Doctor dropped the last few feet into the semi-darkness.

He turned and helped Romana down. Romana's voice had a faint metallic echo. 'Where are we, Doctor?'

'Right at the bottom of the ship. Somewhere near the disused fuel tanks, I imagine.'

'That sound is much louder now.'

The thump-thump, thump-thump filled the chamber. It sounded not unlike someone tapping softly on a giant drum.

'What are we looking for?' asked Romana uneasily.

‘A way out.’

‘Good. ‘

‘You see,’ said the Doctor, as if continuing some previous discussion, ‘I doubt very much if the creature lives in the Tower. But since the Tower feeds it, I imagine it lives close by.’

‘Creature?’ Romana was appalled. ‘What creature?’

‘We’ll know that when we find it.’

‘How nice!’

Groping around the metal walls, the Doctor found his hand was on some kind of switch. He pressed it, and the area was filled with subdued light.

It might have been better if they had stayed in darkness.

Romana caught her breath in horror. They were in a long narrow chamber. Its walls were lined with metal racks, and on the racks lay bodies, row upon row of them.

Romana forced herself to look more closely. They were the bodies of young people, both boys and girls, and their skins were all a ghastly white.

The Doctor was making a quick examination of the nearest bodies. ‘They’ve all been completely drained of blood.’ He bent down to examine the bottom of the racks.

‘There’s a kind of trough at the bottom here—and a pipe leading downwards.’

The Doctor knelt by a hatch-cover set into the floor and lifted it open. It gave onto the top of a vast under-floor tank, filled with some reddish-black fluid. The Doctor closed the lid. ‘I was wrong, Romana. The fuel tanks aren’t disused. Only this isn’t rocket-fuel—it’s blood.’

Romana gave a long shuddering gasp of horror. ‘Doctor, let’s get away from here!’

‘I quite agree. Come on.’

On the far side of the room, they found another ladder leading downwards. It led into a circular metal chamber with rough-cast metal

walls, blackened with smoke. There was a circular hole, like a well, set in the middle of the floor.

'Where are we now, Doctor?'

'Ignition chamber.'

'What's that hole?'

'One of the rocket vents, I imagine.'

'Then surely it must lead to the outside?'

'Only one way to find out!'

The Doctor sat on the edge of the hole, dangling his legs and then pushed himself over the side. He disappeared with a kind of whoosh, which was followed by a thump, and then a yell.

A moment later his voice came echoing upwards. 'Come on, Romana!'

Gingerly Romana dangled her feet over the edge and then let herself go. There was a brief, bumpy slide through the darkness, and then she shot out of the tube, landing more, or less on top of the Doctor, who gave a yell of anguish.

'What's the matter?'

'You landed on my toe! Are you all right?'

'No, I'm tired, confused and frightened.'

'Good, good,' said the Doctor absently. 'Soon be there!'

'That's what frightens me!'

The thump-thump, thump-thump was much louder now.

'What is it, Doctor? It doesn't sound like an engine.'

'I think it's the beat of a giant heart.'

Romana looked around. Although they had dropped out of the bottom of the rocket tubes, they were not out in the open, as she had hoped. They seemed to be in a long narrow cave, hung with ornate stalagmites and stalactites.

At the far end of the cave an altar stood before an archway.

The sides of the giant rocket disappeared upwards through the roof. By accident or design the rocket must be set into the cave system like a candle into its holder, thought Romana, with the above-ground sections forming the Tower.

The Doctor was examining the base of the rocket.

A thick semi-transparent plastic tube emerged from an outlet low in the rocket's side, and disappeared under ground. The tube was filled with the same reddish fluid as the fuel tanks. The liquid in the tube was pulsing steadily, and with a thrill of terror, Romana realised that it pulsed in time to the sound of the giant heart-beat.

'Do you know what that is, Romana?'

Reluctantly, Romana made herself face the terrifying truth. 'A feeding-system—for something that lives on human blood.'

'Exactly,' said the Doctor sombrely. 'Do you realise, there are vampire legends on almost every inhabited planet?'

'There are?'

The Doctor lowered his voice to a blood-curdling whisper. 'Yes. Creatures that stalk the night, and feast on the blood of the living. Creatures that fear sunlight, and running water, and certain herbs. Creatures so strong that they're almost immortal. They can only be killed by beheading — or a stake through the heart...'

The Doctor stared wide-eyed into space, as if gazing upon unspeakable horror.

'Please, say something,' whispered Romana, now more terrified than ever.

The Doctor came out of his semi-trance. 'Still, whatever it is, we want to find it, don't we?'

'No,' said Romana firmly.

Once again, the Doctor wasn't really listening. 'That's the spirit. Come on, then!' He headed for the stone altar on the other side of the cave.

At least they were near the open air, thought Romana.

The arch beyond the altar gave out upon a kind of amphitheatre, a huge bowl-shaped depression in the ground, surrounded by pillars. The whole area looked gloomy and sinister. It had a kind of ceremonial look to it, thought Romana. Like a burial ground, or a place of sacrifice.

The really frightening thing was that the entire surface of the ampitheatre seemed to be moving, pulsing gently in time to the beat of the giant heart. Perhaps it was a burial ground after all, thought Romana. Only whatever had been buried was still alive. 'Where are we, Doctor?'

Before the Doctor could answer, a deep voice spoke from behind them. 'You are in the Resting Place.'

The Doctor and Romana turned. A man stood in the centre of the cave. He was medium-sized, bearded, and he wore a plain and sombre robe. He had the same white face and burning eyes as Zargo and Camilla.

'Where did you say we are?' asked the Doctor politely.

'In the Resting Place,' said the bearded man reverently.

'I am Aukon. Welcome to my domain.'

8

The Resting Place

So this is Aukon, thought the Doctor, third member of the unholy triumvirate — the Three Who Rule.

Or perhaps the first. For all his simple dress and unassuming manner, it was clear that Aukon was a man to be reckoned with. His whole manner was one of massive confidence, and of a kind of holy exaltation. Aukon was a fanatic, far more dangerous than the petulant Zargo, or the icy Camilla.

The Doctor was both worried and frightened, and as usual he covered up by acting the fool. 'Well, I'm glad to catch somebody at home.' He looked round hopefully.

'Charming place you have here. Are we in time for the guided tour?'

'You are a fool to mock; Doctor. There is power here such as you have

never dreamed of—can you not feel it?'

That was just the trouble — the Doctor could feel it.

Waves of some icily malignant power flooded from Aukon.

No, not *from* Aukon, thought the Doctor suddenly, but *through* him. The source was the ampitheatre beyond the altar, and whatever lay buried beneath. Buried, but alive —

and about to awake. Clowning still, the Doctor held up his finger as if testing the wind. 'Feel it? No, I can't feel anything.'

But he lied and Aukon knew he was lying. 'Power, Doctor. It is the only reality. You cannot hope to fight it.

Why try when you could share it, become part of it?'

'Me?'

'When I sent my winged messengers to hunt you down, I sensed the power of your mind through theirs. We seek such intelligences as yours for our great purpose.'

'What purpose is that?'

'The Time of Arising, when we, the servants of the Great One, shall swarm across the universe. You could be one of us!'

'I could? Well, it's very kind of you, but I've never been a great one for swarming.' Casually the Doctor added,

'Anyway, where were you thinking of swarming *to*?'

'Out of this universe, and back to our own.'

Romana felt a sudden surge of excitement. 'You mean you know the way out of E-Space?'

'That is the secret of the one who brought us here.'

'Aha!' said the Doctor triumphantly. 'So there was a guided tour. I suspected as much.'

Aukon seemed to be gazing into the past. 'We were summoned, all of us, the whole ship, to be his servants.'

‘Was that when you were just plain Science Officer O’Connor?’

Aukon’s eyes widened. ‘You know?’

Romana was even more astonished than Aukon. ‘Are you saying he was O’Connor?’

‘Yes. The Three Who Rule aren’t just the descendants of the original ship’s officers — they *are* the originals.’

‘But how could they be? After a thousand years...’

It was Aukon who answered her question. ‘He has given us eternal life. He summoned us here, speaking to the others through my mind. He was wounded, near to dying when we came. We fed and nourished his body with human blood, his spirit with the souls of the sacrificed.

Now he is regenerated, ready to arise.’

Romana’s mind was fixed on one vital fact. Aukon, or rather whoever — or whatever — Aukon served, knew the way back to the normal universe. ‘Doctor,’ she whispered.

‘Shouldn’t we pretend to co-operate with these people, until we can get hold of the data on E-Space?’

For a moment the Doctor was tempted, then he shook his head. ‘No, it’s too dangerous, that thing’s too powerful.

If we give way to it in the slightest, it’ll take us over forever. Our only hope is to fight back every inch of the way.’

‘Consider,, well, Doctor,’ said Aukon persuasively. ‘Will you not join us — like your companion?’

The Doctor was genuinely baffled. As far as he knew, Romana was his only companion apart from K9, and she was here beside him. ‘What companion?’

‘The boy. He is to be the Chosen One.’

‘What boy?’

‘He came to the Village, looking for you. The name he used was Adric.’

Romana looked at the Doctor. ‘Adric? What’s he doing here?’

‘The young idiot must have stowed away in the TARDIS. It’s happened before.’

Aukon said, ‘He is now a servant of the Great One. You will all serve the Great One, Doctor, one way or another.

Speak! Will you join us — or will you feed the Great One with your blood? There is no other way.’

The Doctor’s voice rang through the cave. ‘You are wrong, Aukon. There is a third way!’

‘And what is that?’

‘I can destroy him. Run, Romana!’

The Doctor thrust Romana towards the arch. He was about to follow her when Aukon shouted, ‘Stop! By the power that is in me, I command you !’

The Doctor found he could not move. He was trapped, held by Aukon’s burning gaze. He felt it grip him like a physical force, as it turned him round to face Aukon, and began forcing him to his knees.

Summoning every ounce of his will, the Doctor struggled to resist. But the evil power that flowed through Aukon was too strong for him. ‘I will not serve,’ muttered the Doctor. ‘ *I will not serve*.’ Slowly, inch by inch, he was forced to his knees.

When she saw what was happening to the Doctor, Romana abandoned any attempt to escape. Desperately she looked round for some way she could help. A jagged stalagmite protruded from the cave wall beside the arch.

Romana grabbed it, snapped it off, and hurled it at Aukon.

Aukon whirled round, raised his hand — and the flying spear of stone shattered to pieces in mid-air.

Aukon smiled triumphantly, but the distraction, tiny as it was, had been enough for the Doctor. Breaking Aukon’s spell with a mighty effort of will, he sprang to his feet.

‘Cover your eyes, Romana.’ he yelled. ‘Don’t look at him.’

Deliberately turning his gaze away from Aukon, the Doctor shouted, ‘Your powers may be enough to bully half-starved peasants, Aukon,

but they don't scare Time Lords.'

'Time Lords!' Aukon seemed transfixed with astonishment, abandoning his attempt to dominate the Doctor. 'Time Lords — the ancient enemies.'

Taking advantage of his confusion, the Doctor was about to hurry Romana through the arch when Zargo and Camilla appeared, barring his way.

Zargo smiled. 'Always so anxious to leave us, Doctor?'

There was a red glare in his eyes.

Hungrily Camilla licked her lips. 'Now is the time of our feast. We shall drain the blood from your bodies, slowly, drop by drop...'

The Doctor prepared himself to fight for his life. But with these two in front of him, and Aukon behind—with that thing, whatever it was, beneath the amphitheatre feeding them power...

The muffled heart-beat became louder and suddenly Aukon shrieked, 'Stop! Be silent, all of you! The Great One speaks.'

Zargo and Camilla fell back, as Aukon advanced upon the altar, his eyes wide with awe. He fell to his knees, and when he spoke there was rapture in his voice. 'I hear you, O Great One. Your faithful servant Aukon awaits your command.' He paused, as if listening, hand then bowed his head. 'It shall be as you command, Great One. The sacrifices will be made. At the Time of Arising, you shall taste the blood of your ancient enemies.' He rose, advancing on the Doctor and Romana, his eyes burning fiercely. 'You have been chosen, Time Lords. You have both been chosen — for blood sacrifice, at the Time of Arising!'

Grim-faced in his guard's uniform, Tarak strode along the upper corridors of the Tower, doing his best to look like a man on some immensely vital mission, and hoping no one would ask him what it was. He was heading for the detention area, on the assumption that the Doctor would more probably be there than anywhere else, when he heard heavy footsteps tramping towards him. Ducking into a side corridor, Tarak looked cautiously around the corner, and saw the Doctor and Romana being marched along by three guards, Zargo and Camilla following on behind. The little procession came to a halt outside an arched door. A guard hurried forward, slid a plastic code-key into a slot, and stood back as the door slid open. Zargo and

Camilla went inside, the door closed behind them. The guard retrieved the card from the slot, tucked it in his belt, and took up his position outside the doors.

The remaining guards marched the Doctor and Romana onwards. Cautiously Tarak slipped along the corridor after them. He followed the little group to the detention area, where it halted for a second time. One of the two remaining guards, produced another code-key, opened a cell door with it, and ushered the Doctor, Romana and the remaining guard inside. He closed the door, retrieved the code-key and remained outside, on guard.

Zargo and Camilla weren't taking any chances with their prisoners, thought Tarak. A locked cell, a guard inside, and another outside. It was difficult. But it wasn't impossible. What he needed was a plan...

The door through which Zargo and Camilla had passed led to a place called the Inner Sanctum, where they slept for most of the daylight hours. It was a gloomy, black-draped chamber, with a large double-bier in the centre.

Moving in their usual uncanny unison, Zargo and Camilla descended the stairs and went over to an alcove with an ornate hand basin, and began an elaborate ritual of hand-washing.

Linked as they were, Camilla could feel Zargo's unease.

She put a consoling hand on his shoulder. 'Courage. We are near the moment of triumph. We shall not fail.'

'Why must it always be Aukon who speaks to the Great One?' muttered Zargo peevishly. 'He promised to share his power with us, yet he retains it.'

'The power *is* shared,' said Camilla soothingly. 'Aukon's mind is a channel, no more. Besides, it hardly matters now.

The Time of Arising is at hand, and we shall all be equal before the Great One.'

Zargo was still a prey to his fears. 'This Doctor... he is a Time Lord, it seems. What is he doing here, at this time?'

'We have him safe now. Tonight his blood and his soul will be merged with the Great One. Come, we must rest now. Tonight, when we wake, we shall feed.'

Zargo grasped her hands. ‘Ever since this Doctor came here, I have been afraid. Why am I still afraid?’

Camilla pulled her hand away — but not before she felt the sweat of fear on Zargo’s palms.

The cell was just a cell, a bare metal chamber with a bunk along one wall. The Doctor and Romana sat side by side on the bunk, talking in low voices. The guard by the door paid no attention to their conversation — his only concern was to see that they stayed in the cell until they were needed.

The Doctor settled his shoulders against the metal wall.

‘When I was very young,’ he began conversationally, ‘ I used to go and visit an old hermit. He lived in a cave, in the mountains of South Gallifrey.’

‘I suppose he led a very sheltered life,’ said Romana idly.

‘Yes,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully, ‘ I suppose he did.

He knew a lot of stories, though, old myths, legends, things like that. He used to tell me ghost stories. I like a good ghost story. Would you like to hear one now?’

‘No,’ said Romana. She did not expect the Doctor to take any notice, and he didn’t.

‘One of them was a particular favourite of mine — even though it always used to give me nightmares. I was probably one of the last children on Gallifrey to have genuine nightmares.’

‘That explains a great deal,’ said Romana acidly.

The Doctor was quite undeterred. ‘This particular story was about a race of giant vampires.’

‘ *Giant* vampires?’

‘That’s right. They appeared out of nowhere and swarmed all over the universe.’

‘What did they do, Doctor?’

‘Swarmed—that was the word he used.’

‘It was the word Aukon used, too.’

‘So it was. Anyway, these particular vampires swarmed and swarmed, and they were so strong that one single vampire could suck the life out of an entire planet.’

‘One single vampire? Rubbish! Scientifically speaking—

’

‘Well, he wasn’t a scientist,’ said the Doctor rather crossly. ‘There are other ways of looking at life, you know.

Perhaps he was speaking poetically. I do wish you wouldn’t keep interrupting.’

Romana gave a mutinous ‘Humph!’

‘Anyway,’ the Doctor went on, ‘according to the story, we Time Lords hunted the vampires down in a war so long and bloody that we forswore violence forever. There was one great final battle, and the vampires were completely defeated.’

‘So they were all destroyed?’ said Romana hopefully.

‘Oh yes, I think so.’

Romana gave a sigh of relief. ‘Good!’

‘All except one.’

‘I knew it!’

‘One of them escaped, I think. Just vanished, into thin air.’ The Doctor made a vanishing noise. ‘Pff!’

‘Just like the *Hydrax*,’ said Romana. ‘Into E-Space.’

‘That’s right,’ said the Doctor. ‘Just like the *Hydrax*!’

9

Escape

Tarak marched along the detention area corridor and came to a crashing halt opposite the guard. ‘I’ve been sent to relieve you,’ he barked. ‘Give me your code-key and go off duty.’

The guard stared at him in amazement. ‘Why? I’m not due to be relieved till nightfall.’

‘Don’t argue with me — go and argue with Guard Captain Habris.’

The mention of Habris’s name clinched things and the guard reached for the code-key. Then he paused, looking at Tarak with dawning recognition. ‘Wait a minute, I know you. You’re Tarak — Tarak the traitor. You ran off to join the rebels!’

The guard opened his mouth to shout an alarm. Tarak jumped him, choking the cry in his throat. They fell to the ground, struggling furiously.

Romana was still brooding over the Doctor’s story. ‘When was all this supposed to have happened?’

‘Oh, back in the misty dawn of history, “when even Rassilon was young.” ‘

‘I worked in the Bureau of Ancient Records for a time,’

said Romana.

‘Very educational. So?’

‘Oh, it’s probably nothing. It’s just that I once came across a reference to something called the Record of Rassilon, in one of the old data banks.’

The Doctor held up his hand. ‘Sssh!’ There seemed to be a muffled thumping coming from outside the door.

‘Thought I heard something. Go on. What was it this Record of Rassilon?’

‘An emergency instruction. A copy was to be installed in all time vehicles. Nobody remembered why, though, and in time the practice was discontinued. I suppose the older type of vehicles might still have one.’

‘How old?’

‘Oh, as old as the Type Forties, for instance.’

‘The TARDIS happens to be a Type Forty.’

‘Oh, does it?’ asked Romana innocently.

The Doctor grinned. ‘Romana, you’re wonderful.’

‘I suppose I am. I’ve never really thought about it!’

The Doctor listened. The muffled thumps. were still going on. They grew louder and then suddenly stopped.

Something was going on, thought the Doctor, and he might as well try to do his share.

He called to the guard. ‘Can’t you hear that row?

Something’s happening out there.’

‘Never mind about out there,’ said the guard stoically.

‘My orders are to keep an eye on you in here.’

‘Then in that case I think there’s something you ought to know.’

‘Oh yes? What?’ The guard came over to the bunk and stared suspiciously down at the Doctor.

‘This,’ said the Doctor. A long arm shot straight up, and a bony fist took the guard under the chin. The Doctor caught him as he fell and laid him out on the bunk, just as the door swung violently open, almost crushing him behind it.

Tarak stood in the doorway. ‘Where’s the Doctor?’

Here,’ said the Doctor with dignity, and emerged from behind the door, rubbing his nose.

‘Are you all right?’

‘I’m fine.’

‘We’d better get a move on, then.’

Tarak dragged the guard he had just knocked out into the cell, dumped him beside the one on the bunk, and ushered the Doctor and Romana into the corridor, locking the cell door on the two guards with his stolen code-key.

‘Come on, then, this way.’

‘Where to?’

‘I know a back door that might still be unguarded — if we’re lucky. But we’d better hurry.’

In the rebel HQ, Veros lay stretched out on his bunk, wondering when Tarak would get back from the Tower —

wondering if he would ever get back at all. Perhaps Tarak was right, perhaps they had all waited too long.

Unable to rest, Veros rose and stretched, and wandered over to Kalmar, who was still hunched over the video console. ‘Still tinkering with that thing, are you? Should have thought you’d be fed up with all those old records by now.’

‘It isn’t just records,’ said Kalmar proudly. ‘I’ve discovered a new facility.’ Kalmar produced the technical word with pride.

‘A how much?’

‘Something else it can do. Look!’

Veros looked. On the screen was a kind of computer-stylised map. ‘What’s that? More history?’

‘Not history, Veros, the present. I’m scanning the surrounding countryside.’

‘You’re what?’

‘Scanning, Veros,’ said Kalmar patiently. ‘With this machine I can see all around us. Don’t you understand?

We can never be taken by surprise.’

Veros peered at the screen. ‘Thought I saw something moving.’

‘There’s a full choice of frequencies,’ said Kalmar proudly. ‘I’ll switch over to infra-red.’ The picture blurred and cleared, and this time a small dot could be seen moving across the screen. ‘Look,’ said Kalmar. ‘You see?

There’s someone out there, and he’s moving this way!’

He seemed far more excited by his ability to spot the approaching newcomer than by any possible danger the stranger might represent.

Veros had a more practical turn of mind. ‘I’ll go and check.’ He grabbed a spear and hurried out, returning a few minutes later with a grey-cloaked figure. ‘It’s Ivo!’

Kalmar looked up in astonishment. Ivo’s whole value to the rebels lay in the fact that he was thought to be a loyal servant of the Lords. It was unlike him to compromise his position. ‘It’s dangerous for you to come here, Ivo.

Dangerous for all of us. Suppose you were followed? Why didn’t you use the communicator.’

Ivo’s face was grim. ‘I needed to talk to you face to face, not through that squawk-box. How did Veros know I was coming?’

‘We have a scanner now,’ said Kalmar proudly. ‘We can cover all the surrounding area. Maybe even reach the Village and the Tower, if I can boost the range a little.’

Ivo stared blankly at the little screen.

‘We’ll be safe now,’ urged Kalmar. ‘We’ll have warning of any attack, we can spot Zargo’s patrols. It’s heat-sensitive, you see, it can detect the presence of life.’

‘Then it won’t help me find my son, will it?’

Kalmar’s face was grave. ‘Karl? He’s dead?’

‘They dumped his body outside my door at dusk. Those monsters drank his blood.’

‘Why?’ whispered Veros. ‘Why?’

‘For a warning, I suppose, and to frighten the others.

Maybe they suspect me, because I talked to the strangers.’

Ivo laughed bitterly. ‘Don’t let it worry you, Kalmar, you’re safe enough, aren’t you? Technological rats, living safely in your little hole.’

‘I’m sorry; Ivo,’ said Kalmar slowly. ‘We’re all sorry, you must know that.’

Ivo said gruffly. ‘ I didn’t come to tell you about Karl.

I've discovered something important — one of the guards had too much wine. There's something happening at the Tower tonight, some kind of ceremony to make the power of the Lords greater than ever. They'll all be busy.

Whatever's going on, we've got to stop it. I'm going to attack — tonight. I've got quite a few supporters in the Village now, and they're almost as angry as I am about Karl's death. I shall wait until tonight, gather all my people and attack the Tower.'

Kalmar was horrified. 'Ivo, it's too soon.'

'No, Kalmar it's too late. Too late for Karl, and probably for me as well, but I can wait no longer. We attack tonight.

Are you with me?'

Kalmar was silent.

Ivo looked round the room. 'I see. Well, it's what I expected. You and the rest of your heroes can watch us die on the scanner, Kalmar. But remember this — very soon, when they've finished with us, they'll be coming for you!'

Tarak led the Doctor and Romana unerringly along through the Tower. Avoiding the main corridors and using sub-corridors and access tunnels, be brought them at last to the still-unguarded door by which he had entered.

The Doctor paused in the doorway. Briefly he told Tarak of their discoveries. 'Now, listen, Tarak, we've got to go back to our ship for some vital information. Something I hope will help us to defeat the Lords. I want you to go to Kalmar. Tell him to prepare a full-scale attack, but not to move before I join you.'

'Very well, Doctor, I'll try. And you needn't worry about old Kalmar acting too quickly. The problem will be to get him to attack at all.'

'Well, do your best. Come along, Romana.'

Romana did not move. 'Doctor, we've forgotten something.'

'What?'

'Adric. He's still a prisoner here. We've got to rescue him.'

'Romana, if that thing down there is what I think it is, and if it escapes

into our universe, billions of lives will be lost. I can't endanger all those lives for the sake of just one stowaway.'

'I'm afraid I can't think in billions,' said Romana. 'I can only think of Adric — alone and a prisoner in this Tower.

You go to the TARDIS, I'll join you as soon as I can.'

'But I can't leave you here alone,' insisted the Doctor.

'She won't be alone, Doctor,' said Tarak. 'I'll stay here with her.'

'But I've no right to ask that of you.'

'You're not asking, are you? Now, you go and do whatever you have to, and Romana and I will find the boy.'

The Doctor still hesitated. 'Are you sure?'

'I've already rescued two prisoners, what's one more?

On your way, Doctor, we'll see you at the TARDIS or at Kalmar's HQ.'

The Doctor nodded. 'Goodbye Tarak. Thank you.

Goodbye Romana.' He slipped out into the night.

Romana turned to Tarak. 'Where do we start?'

'Well, if he's a prisoner, he'll be where you were, somewhere in the detention area.'

'I don't think he is a prisoner, not exactly, or if he is, he's a very privileged one. They said something about him being chosen to become one of them.'

Tarak frowned. 'There's a place they call the Inner Sanctum. No one is ever allowed there but the Three, and it's always guarded.'

'Right,' said Romana firmly. 'Inner Sanctum, please!'

They turned and began their journey, back into the heart of the Tower.

10

The Vampires

The Doctor flattened himself against a tree trunk, as a bat fluttered through the leaves above him. But it went on its way without showing any particular interest in him, and when it did not swoop down to attack, or return with hordes of its fellows, the Doctor moved on, reassured.

Maybe without the telepathic mind of Aukon to control them, the vampire bats of this planet were like the vampire bats of Earth, timid nocturnal creatures, a danger only to the sleeping cattle in the fields.

And Aukon, the Doctor hoped, was convinced that he was still a prisoner, and with any luck was preoccupied with his unholy ceremony.

At last the familiar blue shape of the TARDIS appeared beneath the trees. The Doctor hurried towards it, opened the door and went inside.

With a sigh of relief, he looked round the familiar control room, patting the control console like an old friend. It was nice to be back, especially after a spell in the sinister environment of the Tower.

K9 glided forward to greet him. 'Master, we have had an unauthorised intruder — the young humanoid Adric.'

'I know, I know,' said the Doctor impatiently. 'What do you mean, letting stowaways on board the TARDIS? It's supposed to be a time capsule, not a number 9 bus.'

K9 was hurt. 'Culpability factor zero, Master.'

'Well, never mind about Adric now, he's caused quite enough trouble already. You and I have got work to do, K9.'

K9's tail antenna wagged happily. 'Please specify nature of task, Master.'

'I want you to help me tap the memory core of the TARDIS.'

'More data please, Master. What is the information required?'

'That's the trouble, I'm not really sure. It will probably be classified as obsolete by now, and it'll be buried deep in the data core. It's called the Record of Rassilon.'

'Please specify subject matter of this Record, Master. It will be of help in my search.'

The Doctor cleared his throat. ‘Well, as a matter of fact, K9,’ he said a little awkwardly, ‘to the best of my belief, the Record of Rassilon is about... well, it concerns...’

‘Please specify, Master.’

‘Vampires,’ said the Doctor hollowly.

K9’s head swung round, and his dye screen scanned the Doctor as if checking his mental balance. ‘Vampires, Master?’

‘Vampires!’ said the Doctor firmly. ‘Now, stop arguing and get on with it.’

Plugging himself into the TARDIS console, K9 got on with it. While the Doctor waited impatiently, he searched the antiquated data banks of the TARDIS with all the skill at his command. Finally, he swung round to the Doctor.

‘Investigation completed, Master.’

‘Well?’

‘Nothing, Master.’ K9’s tail antenna drooped disconsolately. He hated to feel he was letting the Doctor down.

‘Nothing?’ said the Doctor outraged. ‘What do you mean, nothing?’

‘Nothing, Master. No data available. There is no mention of the Record of Rassilon.’

‘Have you tried “Rassilon, Record of” ?’ suggested the Doctor despairingly, though he already knew what K9’s answer would be.

‘Access has been attempted under all possible permutations, Master.’

‘What about “Vampires”?’ demanded the Doctor. ‘Did you try “Vampires”?’

‘Information on vampires totally absent from TARDIS

data banks.’

The Doctor’s face fell, and K9 went on consolingly,

‘However, the folklore section of my data banks contains vampire legends from seventeen inhabited planets. I will begin with your

favourite planet, Earth. The legend of Count Dracula...'

The Doctor shuddered. ' No, thank you, *not* Count Dracula. Try "Emergency Instructions" as a general category.'

'There are 18,348 emergency instructions,' said K9

obligingly. 'I will now list them in order of coding...'

'No !' yelled the Doctor. ' No ! No! No!' He calmed himself. 'Sorry! No, thank you, K9.'

Mollified by the apology, K9 said, 'There is one other source of information on this vehicle, Master.'

'There is?'

'It is an antiquated magnetic-card system, Master.'

'Well, why didn't you say so? Of course, that's where it'll be!'

The Doctor rummaged in a seldom-used locker, and after rooting about for some time emerged in a dusty state, clutching a tray of circular plastic discs. Scratching his head, he walked round and round the many-sided console, paused, and then thrust the first card into an inconspicuous slot. 'I've always wondered what that was for!'

For a moment nothing happened, and then there came the whirring, grinding sound of antiquated machinery lumbering into life. A strip of closely printed paper emerged from a nearby slit, projecting jerkily from the console, growing longer and longer.

The Doctor grabbed the first section, holding it up to read it. 'The Record of Rassilon! We've got it! Well done, K9 !' Passing the strip rapidly through his hands, he began reading aloud. '"The Vampire Army." Listen to this, K9.

"So powerful were the bodies of these great creatures, and so fiercely did they cling to life, that they were impossible to kill, save by the use of bow-ships."' He looked up. 'Bow-ships? What are bow-ships?'

'Bow-ships unknown, Master.'

'Never mind, it'll be here somewhere.' The Doctor went on reading. '"Yet slain they were, every last one, the Lords of Time destroying them utterly."' He looked at K9. 'Well, that's good news! "However, when the bodies were counted, after the last great battle —" I knew it,

just like the legend — “the King Vampire, mightiest and most malevolent of all, had vanished, even to his shadow, from Time and Space.”’

The Doctor stared broodingly into space. ‘Until now, K9. Until now!’

‘Please continue, Master.’

The Doctor read on. ‘“Hence it is the Directive of Rassilon, that any Time Lord who comes upon this enemy of our people, and of all living things, shall use all his efforts to destroy him, even at the cost of his own life.”’

‘Query, Master. How may this creature be destroyed?’

‘That’s a very good question,’ said the Doctor solemnly.

‘Let’s see what it says about the battle.’ He ran the printout rapidly through his fingers. ‘Ah, here we are! “Energy-weapons proved useless, because the monsters absorbed and transmuted the energy, using it to become stronger.

Rassilon thought long and hard on this, and at last he ordered the construction of bow-ships —” Aha! — “swift vessels that fired a mighty bolt of steel that transfixed the monsters through the heart. For only if his heart be utterly destroyed will the vampire die.”’

‘Query, Master.’

‘What is it, K9?’

‘Is this data of practical value?’

‘Well, it might come in very handy,’ said the Doctor.

‘Provided we can lay our hands on a mighty bolt of steel!’

The journey back into the Tower seemed both longer and more dangerous than the journey out. Night was falling by now, and the Tower seemed to be waking into life. Guards moved constantly through the corridors, and more than once Tarak and Romana had to duck into a side corridor or service tunnel to escape capture.

At last Tarak peered cautiously around a corner, and beckoned Romana to join him. He pointed. ‘There!’

Romana saw an arched doorway, with a guard standing sentry

outside. ‘It’s guarded.’

‘I told you, it’s the Inner Sanctum. It’s *always* guarded.’

Romana considered. ‘What about the old prisoner trick, then?’

‘What about what?’

Romana explained.

Tarak grinned, and drew the heavy dagger from his belt.

Holding it to Romana’s back, Tarak marched her briskly along the corridor, halting before the sentry.

‘Lord Zargo wishes to see the alien prisoner.’

‘Lord Zargo sleeps. It is forbidden to disturb him.’

‘He wishes to see the prisoner immediately,’ repeated Tarak. ‘I have my orders.’

‘And I have mine,’ said the sentry obstinately. ‘No one must pass this door.’

Tarak decided on a final bluff: ‘You will hand over the code-key immediately,’ he roared. ‘ I take full responsibility. The code-key!’

Intimidated by Tarak’s air of authority, the guard handed over the key.

Tarak snatched it and thrust it into the slot.

Unfortunately he put it in upside down, and the door stayed closed.

Romana saw the error and corrected it instinctively.

‘No, no, not like that, like this!’ Taking the code-key out, she put it back the right way up. The door slid open. Too late she realised that her un-prisoner-like behaviour had aroused the guard’s suspicions. He was staring hard, first at her, then at Tarak. ‘Wait a minute, I know you!

You’re Tarak. Tarak the traitor!’

‘People’s memories are too good around here,’ said Tarak and clubbed him with the hilt of his dagger.

Catching the unconscious guard as he fell, Tarak lugged the body through the doorway, which slid closed behind the three of them.

Dumping the guard at the head of the stairs, Romana and Tarak descended the dark staircase. ‘This way,’

whispered Tarak. ‘Move quietly.’

‘Let’s hope they’re sleeping.’

‘Let’s hope they don’t wake up,’ said Tarak grimly. ‘I’ve heard that when they do wake, they wake hungry!’

They reached the bottom of the stairs and looked round the dank and gloomy chamber.

Zargo and Camilla lay side by side, stretched out on their backs on the central bier. Presumably they were sleeping, but they might almost have been dead. Only the very slightest rise and fall of their chests showed they were still breathing. Stretched out in their ornate robes, they looked like statues on the tomb of some ancient king and queen.

Tarak stared down at them. ‘We could destroy them now, while they are sleeping.’

‘It takes a wooden stake to kill them,’ said Romana practically. ‘We forgot to bring one.’

Tarak tapped the hilt of his dagger. ‘There’s this.’

Evil as they were, Romana could not face watching Zargo and Camilla being stabbed in their sleep. ‘It’s not a wooden stake, is it, Tarak? We’re supposed to be looking for Adric, remember?’

Reluctantly, Tarak moved away, and they began exploring.

Finding Adric was easy enough. He lay on a smaller bier hidden in a curtained alcove, stretched out like Zargo and Camilla, and with the same corpse-like stillness.

Tarak looked at Romana’s worried face. ‘What’s the matter? It is your friend, isn’t it?’

Romana nodded. ‘Oh yes, it’s Adric all right. I’m just wondering if we’ve found him in time.’ She peered down at him. ‘They can’t have made him one of them so soon.

Surely the mutation must take some time?'

Suddenly Adric's eyes snapped open, but his face was cold, expressionless and he showed no signs of recognising Romana.

'Adric,' she called softly. 'Adric, wake up!'

He stared blankly at her. 'What? What are you doing here, Romana?'

'Trying to rescue you! Come on, Adric, wake up!'

Adric stared at her, and suddenly his eyes seemed to focus on her face. 'It's like a dream,' he murmured.

'Someone was staring into my eyes, whispering to me about power and eternal life.' He rubbed a hand over his eyes. 'They were talking about initiating me, at some big ceremony tonight.'

Romana helped him to sit up. 'Come on, Adric, we've got to get out of here.'

A mocking voice behind them said, 'I think not!'

Tarak and Romana whirled round—to see Zargo and Camilla advancing on them.

It was a horrifying sight. The two had awakened in the full vampire state, eyes red and glowing, hands outstretched like hooked talons, sharp canine teeth gleaming at the corners of their mouths.

Tarak drew his dagger and sprang to the attack. His target was Zargo, but Camilla caught his wrist with one hand and twisted the dagger from his grasp, so that it clattered to the floor. For the first time, Romana realised the full extent of the vampire's appalling strength. Tarak was a powerfully built man in the prime of his life, but Camilla held him effortlessly with one hand. Changing her grip to the front of his tunic, she lifted him clear of the ground, and hurled him across the chamber towards Zargo.

Zargo caught the flying body, lifted it still higher, and then dashed it down upon the bier.

The force of the impact snapped Tarak's neck, and he rolled lifeless to the floor.

Camilla ran to the body and crouched beside it, clawing greedily at Tarak's neck.

Realising there was no pulse, she looked at Zargo, her face twisted horribly with rage and disappointment.

‘You have killed him! The blood of the dead is stale and flat. I must feast on the living!’

Zargo smiled horribly, waving a claw-like hand towards Romana. ‘No matter. We still have the girl.’

They advanced on Romana.

Rolling swiftly from his bier, Adric snatched up Tarak’s dagger by the blade, drew back his arm, and threw with all his strength.

The heavy knife flashed across the room, and thudded into Zargo’s heart.

Zargo halted his advance. He looked down at the dagger-hilt projecting from his chest.

Breathlessly Adric and Romana waited for him to fall dead to the ground.

But vampires do not die so easily.

Zargo *smiled*.

He plucked the bloody dagger out of his body, and tossed it away.

Claw-like hands outstretched, the vampires moved in to the attack.

11

The Traitor

Romana and Adric edged away until their backs were to the chamber wall.

The two vampires poised to spring—then a voice called,

‘No!’

Aukon was standing at the foot of the stairs. Such was the authority in his voice that despite their ferocious hunger for blood, the vampires checked their attack.

‘Go, Aukon,’ hissed Zargo. ‘It is too late to interfere now.’

‘I said no,’ repeated Aukon angrily. ‘Get back! The boy is the Chosen One, soon to be joined with us. He is not for you.’

‘The girl, then,’ hissed Camilla. ‘Let us have the girl.’

‘The girl is a Time Lord, one of the ancient enemies of the Great One. She, too, has been chosen. She is to be held for sacrifice at the Time of Arising.’

The Doctor was marching up and down the TARDIS in an agony of indecision. ‘Romana and Adric just aren’t coming, K9. And that probably means Tarak didn’t get a chance to deliver his message. I’m going to have to go to the rebels myself.’ The Doctor paused. ‘But will they help, I ask myself?’

‘Probability of indigenous dissident group rendering effective assistance — very low,’ said K9 gloomily.

‘Sssh, I’m thinking,’ reproved the Doctor. ‘I’ve got to make a very impressive entrance, something that will win them over immediately... Got it!’

He hurried over to the TARDIS console and began making minute adjustments to the navigational circuits, muttering to himself meanwhile. ‘Now, what we need is a very slight spatial movement, and no temporal displacement whatsoever. Very tricky, these short hops, K9!’

‘Relative smallness of E-Space should render fractional displacements less complicated to attain, Master.’

‘Let’s hope so,’ said the Doctor. ‘Good boy, K9. Well, here we go!’ He operated take-off controls, and the central column of the control console rose and fell. It was the beginning of a journey that would be over almost as soon as it began.

Kalmar was arguing furiously with Veros, who seemed to have become far more militant since the disappearance of his friend Tarak. ‘We can’t let Ivo and the villagers attack alone, Kalmar. They’ll all be slaughtered.’

‘And will it help if we are all slaughtered with them, just as we’re beginning to win back some of the old knowledge?

I refuse to throw away everything we’ve gained!’

Veros aimed a vicious kick at the old video console. ‘I’m beginning to think Ivo was right, Kalmar. These toys mean more to you than the lives of our friends.’

‘These toys, as you call them, are the slow secret of victory,’ said Kalmar furiously. ‘Why do you think They are so afraid of knowledge, of science?’

‘Your precious Doctor was a scientist, wasn’t he?’ jeered Veros. ‘Like all the rest, he vanished in the Tower.’

The argument was interrupted. With a wheezing, groaning sound, a strange blue box appeared from nowhere, materialising in the very centre of the rebel HQ.

The astonished rebels leapt back, some fleeing in terror, the bolder ones, like Veros snatching up weapons.

The door of the blue box opened, and the Doctor stepped out. ‘I’m awfully sorry to drop in on you unannounced like this, but we do seem to have a bit of a crisis on our hands.’

Adric and Romana were taken from the Inner Sanctum in chains, and held under guard in the State Room. They stood talking in low voices, while Zargo, Aukon and Camilla held an equally low-voiced conference on the dais.

Zargo and Camilla occupied the twin thrones, while Aukon stood between them. Adric looked at the three sinister figures in astonishment. He looked helplessly at Romana.

‘Look, how about telling me what’s going on here?’

‘You mean you still don’t know?’

‘I told you, I was hypnotised or something. It’s all like a kind of nightmare.’

Romana drew a deep breath. ‘Well, it’s a very long story, but according to the Doctor...’

On the dais, Aukon was saying, ‘ We stand on the very threshold of our triumph. I have communed with the mind of the Great One, and he is ready. Thanks to the blood and the souls that we have fed him, his body is healed of his wounds. He is regenerated, whole once more.’

‘He will arise tonight?’ whispered Zargo.

‘It is certain.’ There was utter confidence in Aukon’s voice. ‘When all is prepared, we shall go to the Resting Place and summon him.’

‘He will be hungry when he awakes,’ said Camilla gloatingly.

Zargo said, ‘Ivo and his villagers will be able to perform one last service for their Master.’

‘And when they have all been devoured?’

Aukon’s voice sank to an ecstatic whisper. ‘We shall leave this miserable space-trap for the real universe. A universe full of rich, fat worlds, teeming with life. We shall suck their blood until they are empty husks, then move on to more worlds, and again on to more — countless inhabited worlds, waiting to feed our hunger!’

‘We have served a thousand years — for this!’ muttered Zargo.

Aukon’s voice was stern. ‘This night our servitude will end, and our glory begin. But remember, the proper rituals must be carried out, or the Great One will be displeased.’

Zargo glanced across at Adric. ‘And what of the boy, Aukon, your Chosen One? I have told you how he attacked me.’

‘He was newly woken. It is possible his mind was confused. I shall examine him further. If he satisfies me, then you shall initiate him as planned — after the sacrifice.’

Camilla looked hungrily at Adric. ‘And if not?’

‘If not, then he dies with the girl!’

The Doctor was doing his best to put some heart into the rebels, but it wasn’t easy. Only Veros seemed convinced of the need for immediate attack. Kalmar and most of the rest were still dubious, though the Doctor was beginning to win them over.

‘I know there are many difficulties,’ admitted the Doctor. ‘Lack of energy-weapons, no real battle experience, almost insurmountable odds.’ The rebels started looking down-cast, and the Doctor decided they needed a bit of inspiration. Borrowing freely from his favourite Earth poet, he went on, ‘But he who outlives this day and comes safe home, shall stand a-tiptoe when this day is named and rouse him at

the name of E-Space!'

The rebels gave a ragged cheer. The Doctor beamed and made a mental note that some day he must pop back to Elizabethan London and tell young Will how well his speech had gone down. 'Well, that's the problem, gentlemen, and there's got to be an answer!'

'But what?' asked Kalmar dubiously.

'That is the question,' said the Doctor solemnly, borrowing from Shakespeare again.

'It's obvious,' said Veros. ' We join forces with Ivo and attack the Tower. Tarak was right.'

'And where is Tarak now?' demanded Kalmar. 'We dare not attack the Tower until we are ready.'

'You've got to be ready,' said the Doctor urgently.

'What's more, you've got to be ready tonight, before that creature wakes to its full life, and strength. You people have had a thousand years to rid yourselves of this evil —

now all you've got left is a few hours.'

Kalmar said sceptically, 'Doctor, as one man of science to another, do you really expect me to believe that some great creature has slept for a thousand years beneath the Tower — and that now it is about to awake and destroy us all?'

'Where do you think Zargo and his friends get their power from?' asked the Doctor desperately.

'From their knowledge,' said Kalmar. 'From science!'

'But they abandoned science — you've the proof of that all around you. Their power comes from the Great Vampire himself! If only I could show you what we're up against...'

'Perhaps you can,' said Kalmar slowly. 'With the scanner.'

'What scanner?'

'That console you got working for us — I discovered another facility, Doctor. We can scan all the surrounding countryside — including the Tower. If this creature you speak of exists... '

The Doctor was already sitting at the console his hands flickering over the controls. ‘Right, Kalmar! In a moment, you’ll be able to see that I’m telling you the truth. Gather round, gentlemen!’

The rebels crowded aroundthe screen and found themselves gazing at a snowstorm of statc. There were angry growls.

‘Hang on a minute,’ protested the Doctor. ‘It’ll take a minute or two for the picture to steady. Ah, there we are!’

The snowstorm was replaced by a blurred computerised picture of the Tower. ‘Visible spectrum’s a bit weak at the moment,’ muttered the Doctor. He made some more adjustments, and the picture began to pulse. ‘Infra-red, picking up life-forms. Now, if I go into x-ray and scan below the Tower...’

The picture on the screen scanned down to the base of the Tower, until it took in the ground beneath. The Doctor adjusted the picture to cover the amphitheatre itself, and soon an enormous shape appeared on the screen. It was a hideous combination of man and bat, and it seemed to stir uneasily in its sleep. ‘If you remember we’re seeing it on the same scale as the Tower,’ said the Doctor, ‘you’ll get some idea of the size.’

‘Incredible,’ muttered Kalmar.. ‘Do you really mean to tell me that something that size is a living creature?’

The Doctor touched another control, and soon a steady thump-thump, thump-thump filled the rebel HQ.

‘What is it?’ whispered Veros.

‘The heart-beat of the Great Vampire,’ said the Doctor solemnly. ‘Well, Kalmar, you’ve seen it and heard it. Now are you convinced?’

Shaken, Kalmar turned to Veros. ‘See if you can raise Ivo on the communicator. Tell him to join us here, with every available man. We attack tonight!’

Romana was just coming to the end of her account. ‘So if the Doctor’s suspicion is right, all the vampires in the stories are sort of race memories of the real thing.’

‘ Ah yes, the Doctor,’ said Adric thoughtfully. ‘ Is to going to come back from the TARDIS?’

‘Well, we were supposed to be joining him thereafter I’d rescued you.’

‘Only you didn’t, did you?’ said Adric slowly.

‘Didn’t what?’

‘Rescue me. Tarak got killed, you got caught, and now the Doctor’s safely out of it. He can clear off in the TARDIS whenever he feels like it. Maybe he will, you couldn’t blame him.’

Romana was furious. ‘Adric, how dare you!’

‘It rather looks as if this is one time the goodies might not win after all,’ said Adric deliberately. ‘You and the Doctor don’t seem to be doing too well.’

‘You’re not doing so much better yourself,’ said Romana scathingly. ‘You stow away in the TARDIS, wander straight into trouble, and then expect us to come and rescue you. I’d be in the TARDIS myself now, if I hadn’t come back for you — and poor Tarak would still be alive.’

For a moment Adric looked rather shame-faced, then he said loudly. ‘Still, I’m all right, aren’t I?’

‘You are?’

‘Now look, I’ve been offered a partnership. Power and eternal life, they said.’

‘Adric, they’re vampires. Do you want to become one of them?’

Adric shrugged, ‘Well, from what you said, you seem to be on the menu tonight — and if it’s a choice between that, and being one of the diners... I mean, there’s not a lot of sense in two of us getting the chop.’

‘When the Doctor gets back from the TARDIS, Adric

— and he will come back for us — he’s going to be depending on your help—’

She broke off as Aukon left the dais and came towards them.

Deliberately, Adric raised his voice. ‘Why am I being kept prisoner like this? She’s the sacrifice, not me. I’m supposed to be the Chosen One!’

Aukon gave him a penetrating stare. ‘And your attack on Lord Zargo?’

‘Look, I’d just woken up from some kind of trance and I saw the girl being attacked. I knew she was a friend of mine, and I tried to help her. Of course, I didn’t know what was going on, or I’d have thought twice about it.’

‘Oh, Adric, no!’ said Romana.

‘Sorry, Time Lady. One of my family’s died for you lot already. I reckon one’s enough.’

Romana tried one last appeal. ‘ Adric, do you know what happens to vampires when they die?’

‘Aah, but they don’t die, do they, Lord Aukon?’ said Adric cunningly.

It was not so much Adric’s protestations of loyalty that impressed Aukon as the look of frozen horror on Romana’s face.

Aukon summoned a guard. ‘Release the Chosen One.

Take him and prepare him for the ceremony.’

A guard unfastened Adric’s chains, and led him away.

‘Prepare the sacrifice also,’ ordered Aukon.

Two guards grabbed Romana and dragged her off.

Aukon turned back to Zargo and Camilla. ‘Come, let us prepare ourselves, also. The Time of Arising is near!’

12

Attack on the Tower

By now the rebels had been joined by Ivo and his men.

The Doctor had convinced them of what they had to do —

the remaining problems concerned how they were going to do it. The Doctor had sketched a rough map of the terrain on the flyleaf of one of Kalmar’s precious textbooks. He was jabbing at it with his pencil. ‘Now then, our HQ is *here*, and the Tower is *there*. We can take the Tower between us, I’m pretty sure of that.’

‘What about Aukon?’ demanded Ivo.

‘Aukon and his friends will all be in the Resting Place.

They’ll be distracted by the ceremony.’

‘What about the guards?’

‘Well, there are ways of dealing with guards. What worries me is how do we deal with that?’ The Doctor gestured towards the bat-shape on the screen.

‘I thought you said your people killed them by the thousand,’ said Kalmar mildly.

‘Only after a long and bloody war, which we almost lost.

Apparently it was the bow-ships that saved the day. They fired mighty bolts of steel to pierce the vampire’s heart.’

‘Isn’t there some other way to kill them?’ growled Ivo.

The Doctor shook his head. ‘I doubt it. Their cardiovascular system is incredibly efficient, you see. They can just seal off minor wounds. I’m afraid there are very practical reasons for the traditional stake through the heart.’

‘Suppose we sharpened a tree trunk?’ suggested Ivo, without much enthusiasm.

‘I doubt if even that would be big enough,’ said the Doctor thoughtfully. ‘Anyway, how would we propel it?

No, what we need is a mighty bolt of steel.’ Suddenly the Doctor leapt up. ‘Of course, that’s it. An arrow of steel and we’ve all been looking straight at it all this time.’ The Doctor rubbed his hands. ‘All right, gentlemen, gather round. We must finalise our plans.’ He looked around the group, some of whom were nearly as old as Kalmar. ‘Now, I don’t think all of you need to take part in the attack,’ said the Doctor gently. ‘What we need is a kind of commando force of the youngest and fittest men from both groups.’

‘Will you lead us to the attack?’ asked Kalmar.

Ivo frowned, but cheered up when the Doctor said, ‘No, Ivo’s the best man for that. I shall have other things to worry about. However, I can lend you a very useful tool.

Armoured, immune to hypnotism, and a dead shot with a nose laser!’

The Doctor whistled and K9 glided out of the TARDIS.

‘Prepared to assume aggression mode, Master.’

‘Well, take care — and look out for those guards. Quite a few of them have got blasters. I’d take care of them first if I were you!’ The Doctor looked around. ‘Very well then, gentlemen, let’s be on our way!’

Weapons were checked, wound-dressings and provisions packed and after a certain amount of wrangling about who was coming and who was not, the Doctor and his little band set off. It was an eerie journey through the owl-haunted forest, but not long afterwards they were lurking outside the door which Tarak had used. By now it was guarded again — at least until the patrolling sentry spotted Ivo. He opened his mouth to yell — and a spear whizzed out of the darkness, and thudded home into his ribs. He fell to the ground.

Two more guards appeared. One of them was brandishing a blaster, and immediately K9 glided forward and shot him down.

‘Come on, Doctor,’ called Ivo and the Doctor was swept along in the mad rush to the door.

Stage by stage they fought their way up the Tower towards the State Room. The pattern was repeated time and again, Squads of guards rushed forward, K9 shot down the leaders. Some of the guards fled in panic, and the rebels soon dealt with the rest. Before long they were stepping over the bodies of the door guards and crowding into the State Room.

The Doctor looked round in anguish. ‘Too late, they’ve all gone!’

‘Stay calm, Doctor,’ urged Kalmar. Despite the fact that he was far too old to fight, he had insisted on coming along as a scientific observer.

‘The ceremony must be about to start,’ said the Doctor.

‘There’s no time to lose. Listen to me, all of you. You’ve got to hold the Tower until K9 gives the signal.’

‘Doctor,’ said Ivo explosively. ‘Much as we appreciate your help, I am not taking orders from a metal dog!’

‘One day you’ll apologise for that,’ said the Doctor severely.

‘Never!’ scoffed Ivo.

‘Never mind the arguments,’ said the Doctor, ‘just trust me and things will work out. After K9’s signal, evacuate the Tower and make your way to the caves below. Find Adric and Romana and rescue them. Once you’ve done that, get away from here as far and as fast as you can. Got it? Good! Now, don’t forget K9 gives the signal!’

It was the crowning moment of Aukon’s life as he led his little procession to the altar. He was flanked by Zargo and Camilla. Behind them came Romana, dressed in a white sacrificial gown that left her arms and shoulders bare. She walked along unresistingly.

Behind Romana walked Adric, uneasy in the gorgeous robes of the Chosen One. Behind Adric marched two guards.

Adric tried to edge closer to Romana. ‘Listen, can you hear me? That was all a bluff,’ he whispered. ‘Watch out for any chance to escape.’

Romana did not respond and Adric realised that Aukon had put her into some kind of hypnotic trance.

Habris came running through the caves and threw himself on his knees at Aukon’s feet. Aukon glared furiously down at him. ‘What is the meaning of this, Habris? How dare you interrupt us!’

Habris was almost babbling with fear and panic. ‘We are attacked, my Lord. Rebels and villagers together. The Doctor is with them, and some strange mechanical-beast that shoots men down.’

‘We must go back,’ said Zargo.

‘No,’ snapped Aukon. ‘The Time of Arising is now! It cannot be postponed.’

‘Then send your winged servants to aid us, my Lord,’

begged Habris. ‘Send the bats.’

Aukon shook his head. ‘No. I have need of them here.

Habris, you and your guards must hold the Tower to the last man. We must have time.’

‘But we are outnumbered, my Lord. Unless you help us, we shall all be killed.’

‘Then die!’ snarled Aukon. ‘That is the purpose of guards. Now go!’

Terrified, Habris stumbled away.

Camilla said, ‘Is this wise, Aukon? When they have captured the Tower, they may come on to attack us here.’

As always, Aukon was totally confident. ‘By the time the Tower falls, the Great One will have arisen. We shall be invincible!’

The Doctor was inside the long metal tube again, shinning up that seemingly endless ladder. He reached the junction point where the ladder divided into three. ‘Now then, three scout ships, three chances. Which one first? This one!’

The Doctor pointed to the left, changed his mind and dashed up the right-hand ladder. It was a bad decision.

Reluctant to return to the battle, but too frightened to disobey Aukon, Habris stumbled along the corridors of the Tower.

He turned a corner, and found himself facing Ivo.

‘Habris!’ said Ivo softly. ‘I have found you at last.’

Habris backed away. ‘I tried to help your son Karl —

but it was hopeless. He rebelled against the Lords, refused to serve them. Lord Zargo ordered his death.’ Habris saw a gleam of hope. ‘Zargo is in the caves below. I can take you to him...’

‘I shall find Zargo for myself,’ said Ivo. ‘But first I shall deal with you!’

His hands closed around Habris’s throat.

The Doctor laboured over the scout ship’s control panel.

‘Dead as a dinosaur,’ he muttered. ‘The circuits must be corroded. Have to try one of the others.’

He disappeared down the ladder.

The little procession halted in front of the altar.

‘Let the sacrifice be made ready,’ ordered Aukon.

The two guards lifted Romana’s unresisting body and laid her on the altar.

At a sign from Aukon, they moved away.

Seizing his moment, Adric drew the ornamental dagger from his belt. He raised it to strike Aukon but, warned by some uncanny instinct, Aukon whirled round, shot out one hand and gripped Adric's wrist with such terrific force that the dagger dropped to the ground.

The little scuffle had alerted the departing guards, and, they came running back.

Aukon threw Adric towards them. 'Seize him!'

The guards grabbed Adric and dragged him to one side.

The Doctor was wrestling desperately with the control panel of the central scout ship. The flicker of energy he had observed on his first visit seemed to have drained away, and the instruments were now completely dead.

The Doctor gave the console a vicious kick, yelled in pain as he hurt his foot, and slid through the hatch.

'Just one more to go!'

Aukon stood over Romana his hands held high. 'O Great One, hear us. We celebrate your Arising with the sacrifice of a Time Lord, one of the race of your ancient enemies.

Drink her blood and her soul, and grow strong.'

Aukon made a ritual gesture and suddenly the sky above the amphitheatre was dark with bats. They streamed into the cavern, filling the air with their chittering, and swirled around Romana's body.

Aukon's voice rose louder. 'Come, O servants of the Great One. Drink! Drink the blood of the sacrifice.'

A bat settled for a moment on Romana's bare shoulder and then fluttered away, leaving a smear of blood behind it.

Frantically the Doctor laboured over the controls of the third and final scout ship. This was his last chance. to put his plan into operation.

'Come on, come on,' he begged. 'What happened to all that Earth craftsmanship, eh? Just because you've been laid up for a thousand years...'

The scout ship's engines gave a faint, protesting murmur. 'That's it! All I need is a scintilla of power in the energy-cells, a few drops of fuel in the emergency tank. O

lovely Earth craftsmanship!'

The sound of the engines rose to a steady roar.

Perched on Zargo's throne, K9 picked up the faint vibration from above.

'Evacuate!' he commanded. 'Leave the Tower at once.

Evacuate!'

The rebels began running from the room. Two of them lifted K9 down and he glided away.

13

The Arising

The engines of the little scout ship were roaring confidently now, as the Doctor made a few final adjustments to the remote-control circuits, which he had re-programmed for a most unusual manoeuvre.

'That should do it,' he said at last. ' A short trip, and a quick flip. Time to be going, Doctor!'

Swinging his long legs through the hatchway, the Doctor disappeared down the ladder.

By now a number of things were happening more or less at once.

The rebels were haring along the corridors of the Tower, heading for the lower-level exits that led to the caves, K9 gliding along behind them.

Romana lay still on the altar, surrounded by a swirling crowd of bats. Another bat swooped for her neck.

Zargo and Camilla looked on in feverish anticipation, waiting for the moment when Aukon would command all the bats to swoop down at once, draining the blood from Romana's body.

Adric watched in anguish, helpless between his guards.

Suddenly he tensed, as he saw Romana's eyes flicker open, just for a second.

The Doctor was still shinning down his ladder at tremendous speed, the whole ship shaking and rumbling above him.

By now the roar of the scout-ship engines was making the whole of the Tower tremble, and the noise was clearly audible in the caves below.

Maddened by the distraction, Aukon swung round. 'The ship! What's happening to the ship?' Billowing clouds of black smoke came drifting downwards.

The engine roar grew louder, louder, until the whole place was shaking. Adric's guards fled in terror. Even the altar was vibrating furiously now, and suddenly Romana woke up and screamed.

Seizing his opportunity, Adric dashed forward and lifted her from the altar, dragging her to the shelter of an alcove at the side of the cave.

Zargo, Camilla and Aukon didn't even notice. Their attention was fixed on the amphitheatre beyond the arch.

The ground was heaving and bubbling, as if in the throes of an earthquake.

But this was no earthquake.

Aukon stared fixedly at the seething ground, his voice hoarse with passion. 'Rise, O Great One, rise!' he begged.

'Rise and lead your servants into your new glory!'

The Doctor reached the final stage of his journey: He slid down the main rocket tubes, and dropped down into the caves, which were filled with noise and smoke and confusion. For a moment he paused, looking back at the rocket. Now, if only everything was going according to plan... If only the long-disused control circuitry was still operational... If only... Crossing his fingers, the Doctor hurried across the cave.

The villagers who had refused to join Ivo's rebel band were all locked into their huts, doors barred and windows shuttered, hoping that the terrifying events of the night would pass them by.

This was unfortunate, because if any of them had been bold enough to be out and about on this extraordinary night, they would have seen a truly amazing sight.

The Tower which had dominated their village for so long was changing shape. One of the triple turrets that were the Tower's most remarkable feature was rising slowly in the air on a pillar of flame.

One of the *Hydrax*'s three Arrow-class scout ships was making its first trip for a very long time.

The Doctor ran across the cave and found Romana and Adric hiding in their little alcove. 'This will teach you to stow away, Adric. Are you all right, Romana?'

Romana said shakily. ' I think so, Doctor.'

'Well, don't be frightened, I'm going to tell you what's happening.'

'Don't bother, Doctor. I think I know already.'

'You do?'

'Yes. You've just sent one of the scout ships on a little trip?'

'You guessed! I wanted it to be a surprise!'

Romana grinned. 'Don't worry, Doctor. It'll be a surprise for those three all right!'

Aukon, Zargo and Camilla were staring raptly through the arch, completely absorbed in what was happening in the amphitheatre. The ground was rippling like the sea now, and great cracks were appearing.

'He rises,' screamed Aukon. 'See, the Great One rises!'

'If anything, anything at all goes wrong with that scout ship,' said the Doctor grimly. 'If I've made even the tiniest of errors in the directional co-ordinates — we're the ones who will be in for a nasty surprise!'

Suddenly the ground cracked open in an enormous chasm and a giant, clawed hand burst through the soil. It waved blindly to and fro, as if searching for prey, and all about it the ground heaved and surged as the giant creature below struggled to free itself.

In the night skies far above, the little scout ship, its fuel tanks almost

drained, carried out one final manoeuvre.

Slowly it turned completely over, so that its sharply pointed nose-cone was pointing downwards.

It seemed to hover motionless for a moment, and then began its descent.

Aukon, Zargo and Camilla looked on in ecstacy as the great clawed hand lashed to and fro. They watched eagerly as part of the massive arm appeared, then saw the curve of one mighty shoulder...

The Doctor waited calmly in his alcove, his arms resting protectively around the shoulders of Adric and Romana.

The creature was almost on the point of freeing itself, he thought. If it became too mobile too soon, if it managed to move clear, his whole plan would come to nothing. Most of the immense sinewy arm was free by now, and more cracks were appearing.

'He comes!' screamed Aukon. 'He comes!'

Romana looked worriedly at the Doctor.

He gave her shoulder a reassuring squeeze. 'Don't worry. 'I'm banking on a very ancient scientific law.'

'What's that?'

'What goes up must come down!'

A whistling roar came from above their heads. 'Down,'

yelled the Doctor. 'Get down!' He bore Romana and Adric to the ground, then cautiously raises his head to see what was happening.

Too astonished to take shelter, Aukon and his two companions saw the scout ship streak down, out of the night sky, and bury itself like a huge steel arrow in the very centre of the amphitheatre.

There was a single colossal scream of agony, unbearable in its intensity, and then silence.

The giant hand blackened and twisted and seemed actually to disintegrate as it was absorbed back into the soil. Zargo, Camilla and Aukon turned slowly round —

and saw the Doctor getting to his feet.

Hissing with rage ail three vampires moved toward him.

Their eyes glowed red, their hands went; like claws, and pointed canine teeth gleamed at the corners of their snarling mouths.

The Doctor edged to one side, hoping to lure the vampires away from his companions. They at least might manage to escape. Ivo and the rebels should be here soon.

The Doctor didn't give too much for his own chances —

not with three of them, and at such close range.

'Overconfidence, that's always been your trouble, Doctor,'

he thought. He felt the rocky wall of the cave against his back, and realised he could retreat no further.

Grouped in front of him in a semi-circle, the three vampires paused for a moment, as if to savour their final triumph. Eyes flaring red, teeth gleaming, hands outstretched like claws, they lunged forwards in unison —

and then froze.

Their faces seemed to dry up, to wither and crack, like sun-baked earth.

The dessicated flesh crumbled from their bodies and for one horrible moment, three gorgeously robed skeletons stood leering at the Doctor, bony fingers reaching out, as if to rend him. Then the skeletons, too, crumbled, leaving three huddled heaps of clothes resting on scattered dust piles on the floor of the cave.

The Doctor drew a long, shuddering breath and walked slowly back to Romana and Adric.

Romana said shakily, 'Are you all right, Doctor?'

'There wasn't anything to worry about really,' said the Doctor cheerfully. 'Their time was over. Once the Great Vampire died...' He patted Romana and Adric on the back.

'Well done, both of you, you've come through a very nasty business indeed.'

Adric looked at the three robes on the floor and shivered. ‘So that’s what happens to vampires when they die!’

‘Glad you didn’t join them, Adric?’ asked Romana.

‘Look, that was all just a bluff, you know, a trick to gain their confidence. It just so happens I was trying to rescue you.’

‘Ah, but you didn’t, did you?’ said Romana infuriatingly.

K9 appeared, followed by Ivo, Kalmar and a handful of rebels. The others were hunting down the rest of Zargo’s guards.

‘Well, we dealt with the Tower, Doctor,’ said Ivo happily. ‘Now, where’s this monster of yours?’ He looked ready to throttle it with his bare hands.

The Doctor pointed through the arch, and the rebels crowded forward, gazing in amazement at the scout ship which was buried for half its length in the ground. Wisps of smoke curled about the hull.

‘So you found your mighty bolt of steel after all, Doctor,’ said Kalmar. ‘What did you do exactly?’

‘Oh, I just fired off one of the scout ships,’ said the Doctor casually. ‘Then I arranged the remote control, so that the ship went straight up —’

‘And came straight down again,’ concluded Romana, smiling at the Doctor. ‘It’s a very old scientific law!’

‘But what happened to the Lords?’ asked Ivo. ‘Where are Zargo and the others?’

The Doctor pointed to the three robes on their three piles of dust. ‘When the Great Vampire died, I’m afraid they just went, to pieces.’

‘As one scientist to another, Doctor,’ said Kalmar solemnly, ‘congratulations!’

‘Oh, it was nothing,’ said the Doctor modestly.

Ivo cleared his throat. ‘There is just one thing, Doctor.’

‘Yes?’ said the Doctor encouragingly.

‘Those things I said about K9. He was really invaluable, in the attack

and when we left the Tower. I feel I really must apologise.'

'Go on then,' said the Doctor.

Ivo gaped at him, and the Doctor nodded, downwards, to where K9 waited for instructions at his feet.

'Ah, I see,' said Ivo. You really think I ought to—'

'Yes,' said the Doctor sternly. 'He's very sensitive.'

Ivo bent on one knee beside K9. 'Sorry, dog,' he said gruffly. 'Well done!'

K9's tail antenna wagged. 'Your apologies and thanks are recorded.' For an automaton, K9 had a very forgiving nature.

14

Departure

There was a lot of clearing up to be done, a lot of congratulations and explanations and organisation to be taken care of, and the Doctor seemed to be in demand for all of it. It was well into the next day before they got back to the TARDIS, still ensconced in the rebel HQ —

Government HQ as it was now, thought Romana, since it appeared that Ivo and Kalmar were going to run things between them.

Even now the Doctor was still hard at work, putting the finishing touches to his overhaul of Kalmar's beloved video console. He straightened up at last. 'There you are, Kalmar. That should do it. There's all the information you need in there. With all that you can get back to a high-technology society in no time. If that's what you want, that is. I always feel there's a lot to be said for the simple life!'

'We've had quite enough of that in the last thousand years,' said Kalmar dryly.

The Doctor grinned. 'Yes, I suppose you have. Still, I'm sure you'll use the information wisely.'

'We'll do our best, Doctor.'

The Doctor yawned and stretched, and headed for the TARDIS, where Romana and Adric stood waiting rather impatiently. K9 was already inside, trying to compute reentry to normal Space with the aid of

additional information gleaned from the *Hydrax* data banks.

Kalmar came hurrying after him. ‘One more thing, Doctor.’

The Doctor paused by the TARDIS doorway. ‘Yes, Kalmar?’

‘If we do manage to raise the level of our technology, do you think that some day we could get the main ship working again?’

‘Well, anything’s possible,’ said the Doctor cautiously, though he found it hard to imagine Kalmar piloting a spaceship.

‘Well, if we did manage to get it working,’ persisted Kalmar, ‘do you think there’s any chance we could ever get out of this E-Space and go back to Earth?’

The Doctor sighed. ‘To be honest, I really don’t know.

You see we came here by some sort of freak accident, but you were brought here by the Great Vampire — and it looks as if his secret died with him. My advice is to make the best of it here. It’s not such a bad planet, now you have it to yourselves. Good luck, Kalmar.’

‘Thank you, Doctor,’ said the old man. ‘Safe journey!’

He turned and hurried back to the console, a source of endless fascination to him.

Adric and Romana waved goodbye and Romana went inside. Adric hesitated in the doorway. ‘Doctor?’

‘Yes?’

‘What happens now — about me, I mean?’

‘Nothing happens. You’re going straight back home.’

‘Have a heart, Doctor. I want to explore the universe.’

‘Home,’ repeated the Doctor firmly. ‘Just as soon as I can get you there.’

Adric grinned cheekily. ‘From what I’ve seen of the TARDIS, that could take quite a while!’

‘Inside!’ said the Doctor firmly. Adric went inside and the Doctor followed, closing the door behind them.

The Doctor went over to the console and found K9, Romana and Adric staring fixedly at him.

Romana said what they were all thinking, ‘Well, Doctor? Where to now?’

The Doctor went over to the console and studied it thoughtfully. ‘Don’t worry,’ he said. ‘I’ll think of somewhere!’

There was a wheezing, groaning sound in the rebel HQ, and the TARDIS faded away. Kalmar watched it go a little sadly. A pleasant fellow, that Doctor. Perhaps a little too erratic for a real scientist, though… Kalmar returned to work.

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